

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RICHARD'S QUIXOTRY.

DURING the terrible days of the Commune Winifred Power had lived in a kind of lurid dream.

She was not a politician, far less a partizan, and if asked a month earlier with which men or tendencies in distracted France her sympathies went, she would most assuredly have been puzzled to answer.

But she was too generous not to be stirred to pity in the inevitable hour when the aspirations of the people were bartered by the selfish and the mean; and her heart was wrung with compassion for the sons and daughters of toil, who, after suffering from generation to generation, and sinning in one brief hour of mistaken hope, turned anew to face the grim reality of wretchedness, and learnt that their sufferings were to be forgotten and only their sins remembered.

She came home one day in a state of great excitement. "It is hard," she cried passionately; startling Martha Freake at her patient work of bandage-making. "You remember Anatole?"

"That nice-looking young joiner you had in once to do some work? Did I not hear that he had joined the Commune?—God help him!" answered Martha.

"He was very enthusiastic and eloquent.—I am sure he was single-minded. And he was as tender as a woman to his poor old bed-ridden mother."

"And has he been killed?"

"No; but arrested. And he will be déporté.—And if he lives to come back, he will be ruined in mind and soul and body."

Martha sat silent: deeply sorry, yet half afraid to say so. She and Winifred had so many poor neighbours and knew them all so well, that her own gentle heart had no room for any feeling but compassion. But she would fain have taught all struggling humanity her own remedy of patience and faith: her own saintly shrinking from violence.

Winifred, quite lifted out of herself in thinking of the miseries and terrors of the Commune, clasped her hands with something of despair.

Martha looked at her lovingly, admiringly, yet a little afraid that her impulsive nature might lead her to commit some rash but well-intentioned act that would possibly land her in troubled waters.

"I hope I shall be left to you for a while," she said simply.

"Dear Patty! for a long while, I trust," answered Winifred, affectionately, and took the wasted hand that was a kind of mute denial of her hope. "But why do you say that now?"

Martha gave one of her wistful smiles.

"You are the best thing I have ever known, Winifred. I would like, before I die, to see you in some safe and tender keeping."

Winifred laughed, perhaps to mask a feeling that Martha's words had roused. "I believe you are afraid that if left to myself I should turn into a new Théroigne de Méricourt," she said. "But you can set your mind at rest, Patty; I have no enthusiasm for a cause. Evil and good seem to me so evenly balanced in all these questions, that I can but weep with the vanquished unit—poor scapegoats, like Anatole, for whose ruined homes society has no pity."

Martha drew closer, and put her head on Winifred's shoulder. This was a pathetic little trick that she had whenever her young protectress showed this too Quixotic spirit. And the girl never failed to feel the appeal, although, perhaps, unconsciously. The sense of Martha's dependence on her was an anodyne to her restlessness, a solace to that passionate desire in her to succour and console, which amounted sometimes to actual pain.

"It always seems to me, darling," said Martha, presently, "that you can afford to be a little adventurous and exaggerated because you are so strong. Your difficulties are never too many for you; you can always carry them. I do not know how to express myself exactly; but I think that other people's difficulties are a kind of snare to them. They get meshed before they know where they are."

"Why, Patty! you are becoming a philosopher. You have expressed in a word what I was trying to think out about poor Anatole."

"Yes," said Martha, quietly. "But I was not thinking of Anatole, but of Dick."

"Oh, Dick!" Winifred's voice changed a little, and her face fell. Martha had made her wince beneath a sharp twinge of self-reproach. One evening, shortly before the firing of the Hôtel de Ville, Richard Dallas had looked in upon them to see, as he said, "if they were safe." Winifred, living on the borders of the workmen's faubourg, went about so fearlessly among the wounded, and counted so many friends among the terrible prolétariat, that the Dallases, especially Dick, were in the habit of half-laughingly prophesying that she would one day be arrested by the Versaillais herself.

Richard, on this special evening, had come in one of his most cynical moods; and found Winifred in her most exalted one. She

had been living all day amid scenes of horror; had seen more than one death, witnessed more than one outburst of tragic despair, and come nearer than she had ever expected to do to the unmarked springs of human feeling. At last some sneer at the people (a sneer very characteristic of the Dallases) stung her to retort.

"It is easy to talk," she flamed out. "No doubt they have sinned, and they are punished by failure. I do not defend them, but I cannot understand anyone being triumphant over their expiation. Ignorance, life-long poverty, and grinding toil are very evil counsellors. If *their* class has much to repent of, has *ours* nothing to expiate? And if they have soiled the sanctity of their cause with crime, is the vengeance of their conquerors one whit less criminal?"

Dick sat quite silent: surprised a little, for Winifred did not often lecture; and also a little amused. She had looked surprisingly handsome as she poured out her eager protest. Moreover her grace and the beauty of her voice suited her momentary rôle. Where another woman must have shrieked and gesticulated, she had all the loveliness of a genuine inspiration. Dick, like all undecided men, was rather attracted by energy in a woman than repelled; and he met Winifred's flashing eyes with a flicker in his own of suppressed but decided admiration. Nevertheless, partly out of love of teasing, he answered with deliberate contempt:

"Because there is not much to choose between the ruffianism that writes its name at the bottom of a cheque and the ruffianism that cannot write at all, I fail to see why one should refrain from shooting any number of murderous roughs. They should be treated like the mad dogs they resemble."

Winifred closed her eyes to hide her starting tears. Perhaps Dick felt instinctively the reproach of her silence, for he added presently, with a fine air of aristocratic fastidiousness:

"I am not particular, but in a world which is composed of swindlers and liars, I confess that I prefer the washed to the unwashed specimens."

Winifred turned and looked at him. He did not take warning by her glance, but continued airily: "Most active people are utterly mischievous; and passive people, like myself, are useless."

"It is a disgrace to your humanity to say such things," answered the girl in low, quiet tones of intense scorn.

The dusky colour flushed into Dick's cheeks. "I do not seem able to please you by anything I say to-night," he remarked a little sullenly, and yet ruefully too. "If I thought you really cared, I might be better," he added, almost in a whisper, and looked straight into her eyes. Chilled by this unexpected obtrusion of personal aims into the midst of her enthusiasm, she pushed back her chair and rose abruptly, saying:

"What can keep Dolly? This is one of her evenings for teaching: but she should be home by now."

"And home she is," said Dolly's own fresh, complacent tones; and her small figure, rain-bespattered, was framed in the door. "Oh, Mr. Dallas!" (unaffectedly pleased and a little patronising) "you see Winifred has not blown us up with petroleum yet. I suppose you know that is her friends' latest threat: but they promise to spare her."

And Dolly laughed at her own wit. She laid aside her waterproof and hat, looking critically the while at the preparations for tea; and as soon as she had divested her small hands of their gloves, walked over and offered one of them condescendingly to Dick.

"What is the matter? Are you not well?" she exclaimed, on thus coming nearer to him.

"Quite well—thanks. Worthless people usually are," answered Dick, a little bitterly.

"Dear me! That sounds quite tragic," said Dolly, good-naturedly. Her bright eyes glanced from one person to another enquiringly; and with characteristic penetration, quickly divined the facts—but not so unerringly their cause.

"Have you and Winifred fallen out?"

"I think that Dick and I will never fall out," said Winifred, gravely, but kindly. "Our good-fellowship—quite a venerable quality by now—will survive all mistakes."

"Even mistaken aspirations?" asked Dick.

"Yes. And ill-advised scoldings," replied Winifred, with one of her charming looks.

"Don't talk about aspirations, for goodness sake," interposed Dolly. "I am sick of the word. If it had not been for a lot of tiresome 'aspirations' (at least, that is what Winifred calls them) we should have had those nice Versailles in two months ago; and by this time I might have had six lessons where I now have three."

Winifred was so glad of the chance, at that moment, to laugh at anything, that she even laughed at this. And Dick laughed also. While Dolly, with her usual small smile of unassuming superiority, sat down to cut the bread and butter.

For the rest of the evening Dick was rather silent, and Winifred talked to him in a kind, sisterly way, that was intended to bring back things between them exactly to their accustomed footing. And when Dick at last rose to go, Dolly, instead of coming forward as she generally did, to light him downstairs, allowed this gracious task to be performed by her decidedly unwilling friend.

Winifred would have given anything to avoid these dangerous "last words," but Dolly never even rose from her seat: just nodded a "good-night" of serene friendliness, and proceeded to thread a needle.

So Winifred walked silently on to the landing and held the lamp aloft, Dick following her with great deliberation.

"Good-night."

"Good night."

"I wish he would go!" thought Winifred, and stood like a statue of Psyche. But Dick lingered. At last, when the silence was becoming oppressive, he abruptly said: "I am not capable of sustained action, Winifred; but I might put on a spurt of heroism perhaps. I promise you that if, within the next few days, I get the chance of distinguishing myself, I will not neglect it." Then, before she could speak, he ran downstairs, and she heard the great portecochère close behind him.

Dolly and Winifred occupied one of the two sole bed-rooms in their tiny apartment: and the hour of the twenty-four to which the latter looked forward with amused pleasure or patient dread (according as she was preoccupied or the reverse) was the time of undressing, during which Dolly incessantly chattered. Her mind was small, but acute, compact and clear-cut as the facets of a crystal. Winifred and she had not a thought or a feeling in common; but they got on admirably together, the one being too noble and the other too insouciant to quarrel. Moreover Winifred, touched by Dolly's energy, half-unconsciously rewarded it by indulging the minute creole propensities towards ease which here and there streaked the little thing's activity. One of these forms of petting was a nightly brushing of Dolly's curly locks. During this operation the stream of conversation was generally at fullest flow; but to-night Dolly sat almost quite silent, and did not even betray the usual little quiver of profound delight which Winifred had long ago noticed in her, and laughingly described as "a latent purr." She herself, on this occasion, was not more disposed to talk than her companion, for she had an uneasy suspicion that Dolly was thinking of Dick.

But all at once the two girls' eyes met in the glass, and the ice was broken.

"Winifred, I am not plain, do you think?"

"Conceited child! Are you fishing for superfluous compliments?"

"Nor stupid?"

"By no means."

"Nor a bore?"

"Will you be satisfied when I have told you that you are irresistible?"

"Don't laugh," said Dolly, with serious candour. "I am quite in earnest. I am following out a train of thought."

This is very often a stupendous operation, but she announced it with the evident conviction that no mental achievement could be considered beyond her.

"By all means; let me have the result."

"You are *handsome*, I know," resumed Dolly, glancing complacently down her own mignonne form. "And you talk about a number of things that it is the fashion to call clever. But, I own, I am sometimes afraid you will be a failure, though rather a grand one. But even so, it would be a pity to waste your gifts

and capabilities on ordinary people, and commonplace opportunities."

Dolly came to a full stop.

"What do you mean?" asked Winifred, with a merry, surprised laugh.

"I think Mr. Dallas fancies he is in love with you. (He would not be a Dallas if he did not fancy something.) But as you would be quite thrown away on him, it is a pity you should encourage him."

"How do you know that I encourage him?"

"I daresay you call your interest in him by some fine, philosophical name, but it is mere flirting for all that," was the calm reply. Winifred bit her lip, for the little barb had shot home; and she remained so long silent that at last Dolly raised her quiet eyes.

"Have I offended you?" Winifred had a sharp, brief struggle with her pride; then, bending her stately golden head, she drew Dolly's small dark face to her, and kissed it kindly on the forehead. People never would understand her, it seemed. A little time ago it had appeared to her so easy to go through existence, giving always more than she received; squandering with both hands her treasure of helpfulness and sympathy, and asking for nothing in return but that people should do their best. But of late she had been conscious in herself of a longing for something more than that critical and half-hearted homage: and at such times, the memory of her last interview with Mark Hatherley would return to her, and bring with it a rush of half-delightful, half-reluctant humility.

The next day the Tuileries went up in flames. Then the final barricades were taken; and "peace" (as at Warsaw) reigned in the stricken city. Most people's occupations were more or less interfered with when not altogether suspended; there was little visiting, in any social sense, and all conventional ceremonies seemed a mockery. Consequently, Winifred, Martha, and Dolly were almost startled one evening when a loud summons of the bell warned them of a visitor; and it was with mixed feelings of pleasure and relief that they welcomed Mrs. Dallas. Her good little figure and timid motherly manner seemed really like the promise of a return to normal things.

"Thank you, my love," as Winifred began to unfasten her cloak. "You are better, Miss Freake? Still coughing? Dear—dear! Do try tar lozenges; they always do Mr. Dallas so much good. Georgie hopes you will come to spend the afternoon soon, Dolly. Winifred, do you happen to know anything of Richard?"

"Richard?" Winifred's heart sank within her.

"He is missing. Has been for three days. Mr. Dallas says he is sure to turn up; but I thought I might as well step round and ask if you knew anything of him." She spoke quite placidly, although her serene face clouded a very little. Questioned, she had nothing to relate beyond the bare fact of Richard's disappearance. "He might merely have gone to Versailles for a change," she

suggested. "Paris was not very agreeable just then. The smell of smoke was sometimes quite suffocating."

"But surely he would have left word with you," exclaimed Dolly. She was really alarmed, and did not care to conceal it. Winifred sat silent, much too remorsefully concerned to offer any remark. All at once, she became aware that the tears were rolling silently down Mrs. Dallas's cheeks; impulsively then she went close to her, and took her hands.

"Such dreadful things have been happening. I can't help thinking sometimes that he may have been shot," said the poor little woman apologetically. "Mr. Dallas says I am very foolish to have such ideas. Of course, Richard is not my own son; but he was only five when I married Mr. Dallas, and such a pretty little curly-haired fellow! A telegram came for him," added she.

"And did that tell you nothing?" exclaimed Winifred eagerly.

"I did not open it, my love. He would not like it to be read perhaps," said Mrs. Dallas dutifully. And she had not told Mr. Dallas about it either, as the "children" did not care for their papa to know everything. Even at this moment Winifred could hardly forbear a smile, at such a quaint instance of motherly watchfulness. Nevertheless, she was possessed with the idea that the telegram might contain a key to the mystery, and so warmly urged its being opened that at last Mrs. Dallas began to hesitate. Still, she had not the courage to open it by herself; still less did she welcome the idea of sharing its secrets with her husband. "If Winifred would take the responsibility?"

Winifred was generally willing to take any responsibility, and made no exception now. She started off with Mrs. Dallas, and was quickly at her destination. Mr. Dallas was out; and so the telegram was impatiently opened and—proved a puzzle the more.

"Throw light on the receipt for the psalter, just found. I am accused of complicity. Answer at once.

"GERTRUDE."

There was not much to be made out of that, and it only gave an acuter edge to the desire for Richard's return. So poor Winifred, ruefully feeling that she had again "interfered," with questionable results, went home and devoted herself as best she could to the task of consoling Dolly.

It was curious to see how completely that little person had appropriated Richard in her own mind. She could not have mourned him more ostentatiously if he had been her affianced lover. Such perfect openness of sentiment in a nature so little romantic had the oddest effect; but it probably made Dolly's force. She knew exactly what she wanted, and never doubted but that she would eventually get it. And such people always succeed.

Nevertheless, her tear-stained little countenance was quite a

pathetic object, and put the crown to Winifred's misery. Twenty-four hours passed in this way, and then one afternoon the two girls were surprised by a visit from Claire.

The fleuriste was generally too busy to make calls, and Winifred had hardly seen her since the day when, through her, she had found out Miss Freake. She went forward in some surprise and pleasure to receive her, but without waiting for any greeting, Claire exclaimed: "You have been anxious about Monsieur Richard? Ah, yes! I knew it. But, *chère mademoiselle*, he is safe. Thank Heaven he is safe—but he had been heroic. My—gratitude—my ——" And at this point Claire, rendered quite speechless by a breathless combination of smiles and tears, sat down, nodded intelligently at her bewildered listeners, and went on volubly again. Monsieur Richard was an angel of goodness. Claire had met him on the very last day but one of the fighting. Avec son petit air calme—you would have thought he cared no more than a graven image what was happening. But he had a heart of gold under that English exterior: Claire had always felt it. He saw her looking sad; he asked the cause; she had poured out the whole story. Her young brother, a child of fifteen, had been led away by some friends of his to join the Federals. And at that very moment he was fighting, she was sure, on the barricade in the Rue ——. He would be killed fighting, or taken prisoner and shot, and Claire would never know a moment's happiness again. Monsieur Richard had no sooner heard this story than he said quite quietly, "I will go and see if I cannot save him;" and almost before Claire could seize the sense of the words he was gone. Mais quoi! she almost laughed on recalling them; he had meant nothing: she could not have heard aright, or it was a mere way of speaking. The days went on—and René returned not. She was sure he was killed—the vision of him lying in his blood haunted her. She went to the police, to the hospitals, to the Morgue even, but found no trace of him. She could not eat, she could not sleep, she was crazy. And at last to-day, just as she felt that she could bear it no longer, a stranger came. René was alive; he was getting better of his wounds; and it was Monsieur Richard who had saved him.

"But how?" cried Winifred and Dolly in a breath, as Claire again paused from mingled emotion and exhaustion.

Monsieur Richard had gone to the barricade, and reached it just as the fight was raging. The Communards had fallen back for a moment, leaving several prisoners in the hands of the Versailles. Among them was René. Oh, heavens! that child. Monsieur Richard recognised him. The fédérés rallied, and made a fresh charge, Monsieur Richard with them, for he had picked up a musket that fell from the hand of some wounded man. They rescued the prisoners, but René was struck and had fallen; he would have been crushed; but Monsieur Richard lifted him up, and, carrying him in his arms, ran with

him along the top of the barricade under a murderous volley of musketry. For fresh troops had arrived, and were encouraging the others. The next moment the barricade was again stormed and taken; but a final desperate stand of the Communards had given Monsieur Richard time to escape. He was wounded in the hand and bleeding; nevertheless, he reached a church that served for a temporary hospital, and gave René into the care of a doctor. Then he had his hand bound up, but he was faint from loss of blood, and could not go so far as his own home. Besides, he feared to compromise his people. So he took refuge with a medical student, a friend of his. In the night his wound became worse; he was feverish, a little delirious even, and only to-day had been able to send his friend first to enquire for René (who was better and had told the story of his rescue), then to Claire.

"And did he send no message to his family—his friends?" exclaimed Dolly, always practical.

"Yes, indeed," answered the fleuriste, warmly. "But the gentleman had engagements; he had lost time at the hospital; he begged her to take the good news. She went, but Madame and Mademoiselle Dallas were out, gone to Versailles to make enquiries there, pauvres chères dames; she could not wait, and had decided, as the next best thing, to come to Winifred and leave the message, with every expression of her own everlasting gratitude."

"You see Mr. Dallas may not talk very grandly, Winifred; but he can act," said Dolly, triumphantly.

"I hope he will one day know how proud you are of him, dear," answered Winifred; and her own eyes were bright.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOLLY.

DICK strolled in a day or two later, looking pale, and with his arm in a sling, otherwise quite unconcerned. Dolly and Winifred happened to be present, with Mrs. Dallas and Georgie; they all sprang up to greet him in glad excitement. But Mr. Dallas, at work upon some illustrations, looked up from his drawing-block with an air of calm contemplation; and his composure was fully equalled by Dick's own.

Outwardly he was rather bored than otherwise by these loving demonstrations, and if anybody could be said to have obtained an answering look from him, it was certainly Dolly. She had, indeed, gone up to him in such eager welcome, looking so pretty in her pleasure the while, that his courtesy was momentarily transmuted into a warmer sentiment.

"You had no need to be anxious about me. You must have known I could take care of myself," he said carelessly, in answer to their affectionate reproaches.

"That was what I tried to impress upon them all," said Mr. Dallas; who, to do him justice, had made secret enquiries for his missing son, while pooh-poohing the "womenkind's" anxiety—on principle. "But to be frank with you, Dick, I am not sure but you have been more fortunate than you deserved."

"A case of a bad shilling, you think?" asked his son.

"It is not your having run into danger that I object to. Your bones are your own to do what you like with," continued Mr. Dallas, with a fine air of impartial munificence. "But to join those villainous ragamuffins! You must have been crazy."

"Take care, papa. You will call down Winifred's wrath," laughed Georgie.

"No," said Winifred, quite softly: but her tone, unconsciously, had a light ring of sarcasm, and Dick turned his eyes upon her.

"Winifred thinks no Dallas a foeman worthy of her steel," he remarked.

"Indeed! I flatter myself I could produce an argument or two as keen as any weapon in her armoury of logic," said Mr. Dallas, rather piqued.

"Possibly. But all counter-thrusts would be wasted upon the family cuirass of self-satisfied superiority," retorted Dick; and this was so exactly what Winifred had been thinking that she could not forbear a merry laugh of appreciation. "By George," continued the young man, "I sometimes amuse myself by constructing a family legend. It runs in this wise. A remote ancestor of ours—for we have a long line of ancestors, Miss Dorothy; we are very aristocratic—having wasted all his substance, lost his steed, been abandoned by his squire, and jilted by the damsel of his dreams, was sitting in a mournful mood under a greenwood tree. To him there appeared a little wizened woman, whom he recognised immediately for a fairy godmother. He began to reproach her: why had she not made him luckier? He was a handsome youth still, albeit a graceless, and her heart, although several centuries old, was touched. She explained to him that his beauty and his talent, the gallant grace that made him irresistible at starting *always*—were her gifts; but that for the ill-luck a malignant fay, whom one of the race had offended, was responsible. And she, although she grieved to state it, saw nothing but failure in every career for him and all his line. He was very much shocked, and asked if there were no remedy. The doom, she said, was unavoidable; but one thing she could do for him, and that was to render himself and all future Dallases invulnerable. Then she presented him with a crystal flask containing water from a magic well, which had properties analogous to those of the Stygian wave; and vanished after assuring him that if he rubbed himself all over with the liquid, and did not lose a drop, he would become both morally and physically pachydermatous (only she did not use so barbarous a word), and transmitting the valuable attri-

bute to his own offspring would enable them and all their descendants to live—through a mere survival of the fittest.”

The three girls laughed and clapped their hands; but Mr. Dallas sat with a slightly contemptuous smile upon his face. His wife looked a little—just a little—scandalised.

“You bad boy!” she said. “What a character to give your family. I am sure dear papa is too sensitive” (Mr. Dallas involuntarily straightened himself); “and then there is Gerty, poor child!—I wish she felt things less.”

“Ah! I suppose Sir Guy de Dallas de Malaventure did spill a few drops,” answered Richard carelessly, but with a softened glance at his good little step-mother, whom he had the grace honestly to love.

“It is plain he did,” said Dolly; “or you would not have that sling on now.”

“That’s what I call a pretty speech,” said Mrs. Dallas kindly. “I do believe dear Dolly feels more for you than any of us.”

Whereupon Dolly blushed furiously—partly with shy consciousness, partly with a naïf pleasure. And she said, in a voice that thrilled with mixed feeling: “It is natural I should feel sorry for him, is it not?”

“Only natural because you do not know what a mere scratch my wound is,” said Dick smiling, rather flattered.

“A scratch? nonsense!” said Dolly gaily. “This is a scratch. The Princess Badoura” (nodding at the Dallases’ white Persian cat) “gave it me the other day—with a will too. But I don’t carry my arm in a sling,” and she held out her pretty, round wrist for his inspection.

Dolly had charming hands: a little brown in colour, but slender and graceful and expressive. Dick took the one extended to him, and let it lie for a moment in his own sinewy palm. Its beauty struck him: its warm touch was magnetic: he pressed it, and looked from the hand to the face. That was pretty also—in just the same brown, piquant way. She had very bright vivacious eyes and a sparkling smile, her teeth gleaming like pearls beneath lips as scarlet as the flower of a pomegranate. Between her warm, soft prettiness, her quick, deft ways, and the touches of rich colour, never wanting to her soberest dress, Dolly always reminded one of a small tropical bird. And her quaint practical mind and manner accentuated this physical charm. Dick had noticed all this before: vaguely, as one notices when but slightly interested. Now, for the first time, he *felt* it. He had been secretly wounded by Winifred’s studied indifference; he was touched now by Dolly’s frank sympathy. Her glance faltered and softened as his own met it. They were standing behind Mrs. Dallas’s capacious armchair.

“Let us see this scratch,” said Richard, in his cool, insouciant way. He bent his head lower: the little hand trembled: then, the next moment rested joyfully in his clasp, for, unseen by everybody but its owner, he had kissed it.

Meanwhile Winifred was telegraphing to Mrs. Dallas, but had only succeeded in reducing that gentle person to a condition of patient bewilderment. In fact she very nearly turned to look behind her own chair, which was the last thing that Winifred would have desired had she known what was going on there. So, at last, Georgie, who had understood at once what Winifred meant, rose, vanished, and presently returned with an air of great mystery. Her eyes were fixed on her father: a paper was half-concealed by the folds of her dress. It was Gertrude's telegram.

"Hallo! what's the meaning of this?" exclaimed Dick, after the telegram had been surreptitiously introduced into his hands by Georgie, while Mrs. Dallas asked Mr. Dallas the hour by his watch. "When did this come?"

"Seven days ago, when you were first missing."

"What is it?" questioned Mr. Dallas. "A telegram from Gerty? What about? Is she going to separate from Sir John?"

"It's a matter of no importance," answered Dick, thrusting the paper into his pocket, and inflicting thereby intense disappointment on Georgie and some pangs of baffled curiosity on her mother.

"We have not heard for some days from Gerty," said the latter in her comfortable, maternal tones. "I daresay her new life is busier than her home one—poor child!"

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and in marched Julie, the Dallases' one servant. There were frequent crises in the household, and they never kept any servant long. The present and out-going "young person" arrived with an air of unmistakable temper; and her appearance created a kind of low, suffused groan. Mr. Dallas extracted his pocket-book to pay her her wages, previous to immediate departure, Georgie picked up the cat with an air of ostentatious indifference, Mrs. Dallas became absorbed in her work. They were none of them on speaking terms with Julie, who had worsted them in several encounters. She stood like a statue while her money was counted out to her; took it and asked for her certificate. "You shall have it," said Mr. Dallas, with significant dignity, and wrote it. She read it when finished, and apparently was satisfied, for she plunged her hand into her pocket, uttered a "Tenez" of supreme contempt, and throwing several letters upon the table, stalked out of the room. Presumably she had sequestered the Dallases' correspondence for some days, intending to make away with it altogether if her claims to a presentable certificate were not satisfied.

Georgie rushed at the letters with all the eagerness of a girl who receives one twice in a twelvemonth. "Two from Gerty, and black-edged! What can have happened!"

They were torn open and eagerly devoured, amid general excitement. "Sir John ruined"—"Sir John dead"—"Chloral"—"Inquest"—"Mrs. Hatherley's behaviour"—"The conduct of the

neighbourhood!" All these astounding items of news, tumbled out heterogeneously by Georgie, who was reading over her mother's shoulder, excited the liveliest feelings of indignation and dismay. Nor were these sentiments altogether unmixed with embarrassment; for Gertrude was by no means measured in her abuse of Mrs. Hatherley, and Georgie, blushing a vivid red, stopped abruptly every now and then in her helter-skelter reading—pulled up by the consciousness of Dolly's presence.

Fortunately that little person was not sensitive on the subject of her relatives. Moreover, she was naturally feeling very warmly just now about anything which concerned Richard; and finally, she was consumed with curiosity. "Pray go on!" she exclaimed, with eager affability, as Georgie stumbled—all too tardily—*anew*; "I know quite well how horrid mamma can be sometimes, and Flossie can be too."

"My dear!" began Mrs. Dallas, gently, rather shocked at such candour.

"Since Dolly does not mind our saying it, I think Mrs. Hatherley *has* behaved abominably," indignantly broke in Georgie. "Just read to the bottom of the page. *I never!!* Gertrude has a horrid temper, but she isn't a thief or a murderess."

"Who accuses her?" enquired Mr. Dallas.

"Mrs. Hatherley; Flossie; the nurse; *your* mother, Winifred. Such things to say! And that business of the Psalter, too. I—Oh! I wish *I* was there!" cried Georgie, and fairly burst out crying.

"Let me see what she says about the Psalter," said Richard, slowly, possessing himself of one letter.

"Let *me* read what she says. It is impossible to understand anything," cried Mr. Dallas, testily, and seized the other letter.

"What is this about the Psalter? Here is a fresh allusion to it, Dick, and to your share in it."

Dick, looking calmly incensed and contemptuous, shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose I may consider myself released now from my promise of secrecy. Sir John got me to sell it for him, months ago, when I left The Limes."

A simultaneous exclamation of horror broke from Winifred and Dolly. "And he allowed poor William to be suspected!"

"I understand now, that the sale was part, perhaps the beginning, of his underhand system of raising money," continued Richard, rather bitterly. "But I dare say Gerty has exaggerated a good deal."

"I am sure she has," promptly assented Mr. Dallas.

"Naturally she would be excited, poor child!" added the meek little mother, smothering her own anxiety, as usual.

Consequently it was agreed that there was no immediate reason for action: that they could safely wait for a day or two until fresh news came; and that, meanwhile, Richard could write to his sister. This he did at once. Mr. Dallas lighted a fresh pipe, and, the excitement having put him into a genial mood, he proceeded to

relate various pleasing anecdotes of unjust suspicion and deceitful appearances. Georgie's sobs gradually subsided, and her mother produced a jar of her favourite quince jam for her especial solace.

That night, when Winifred was sitting alone in her studio, thinking, if the truth must be told, of Mark, and wondering when she should see him again, there came a gentle tap at the door.

"Are you there, Winifred?" asked Dolly's voice outside.

"Yes," Winifred sprang up, and came forward through the semi-darkness, smiling, with a prescience of the coming confidence. Dolly did not keep her waiting for it long; in her practical, prattling way, transfigured to prettiness here and there through a touch of real feeling, she told her that "she knew Mr. Dallas was beginning to care for her now." She had been quite enchanted at his kissing her hand, and related that circumstance, among others, with all possible detail. Winifred listened appreciatively; answered warmly; was genuinely delighted.

"The news from The Limes is exciting also," casually commented Dolly at last, when she positively had nothing more to tell about herself. "Altogether, it has been an evening of emotion. I suppose we shall hear from mamma soon and from your mother? They are both bad correspondents. The only person who seems to have behaved well to Lady Hatherley is Mark. I should be glad to know his opinion of the whole business. He never writes to you, does he?"

"Never," answered Winifred, as a beginning to many other things that she intended to say. But all at once her ideas vanished. Dolly's voice sounded in her ears without conveying any meaning to them. She involuntarily clasped her hands together, and held them so tightly, as though the Winifred of her dreams, the Winifred she had meant to be, but was not, were enclosed there. For Dolly's question had unconsciously enlightened her, and conveyed to her the humiliating conviction that Mark's silence robbed self-sacrifice, work, duty, life itself, of charm.

Martha Freake was not so well next day. She frequently alternated from one state to the other; and Winifred had a melancholy feeling that the end was very near. Finding her now so weak, Winifred quietly decided that the greater part of the day must be given up to nursing her, and she consequently let Dolly go alone to the Dallases to ask for further news from The Limes. Dolly, nothing loth, as may be imagined, started off, the recollection of the previous evening keeping up sweet music in her heart as she hurried through the streets.

But a surprise awaited her. Instead of the scene that she had expected, viz., a new letter from Gertrude, and the family party discussing it in their own peculiar fashion, she found that no fresh news had come from The Limes; while the anxiety this might have caused under ordinary circumstances, was quite forgotten in a different source of interest. Dick had been offered employment

in America, and was seriously inclined to accept it. An old friend of Mr. Dallas's had a numismatic mania. Wealth acquired in the States had enabled him to gratify this taste; and now possessing an almost unique collection, he wished to have it catalogued. He could presumably have found a young man in his own town of Boston to do it for him; but he chose to prefer Dick to any other. Chance had made him acquainted with Mr. Dallas's position, and Mr. Dallas was one of those people who, without one single recommendation save an indefinable charm, are kept afloat by the tenacious memory and the inexhaustible patience of their friends.

"I suppose there is no danger of this cataloguing turning out a mere blind, like Sir John's," he said—always wonderfully cautious when he himself had nothing to gain or lose.

"Not likely," answered Dick. "Such a coincidence would be too unlucky, even for us. And the best guarantee of his good faith is the figure of the offered salary. I think I cannot do better than accept."

"Then accept, by all means, my boy. Who knows? You may be able to do even your unfortunate old father a good turn: and we could all join you. Georgie might marry the chief shareholder in some silver mine, and you find your way into the good graces of an heiress."

A pause. Dick and Georgie were both rather flattered, while the bewildered Mrs. Dallas was engaged in her usual chase after the nimble minds of her family. Only Dolly stood a stranger in their midst, her heart feeling like a lump of ice, her eyes full of a wistful disenchantment that would have struck pity in anybody sufficiently at leisure to heed her.

Dick disappeared to answer the letter; his father, dreaming of an El Dorado, left his work, already in arrears, and went to smoke on the Boulevard, while Mrs. Dallas and Georgie kept up a lively babble, and Dolly answered without understanding them. The poor child was quite unable to re-act as a stronger, prouder, and more complex nature would have done, against the sorrow that had overtaken her. Her character, all of a piece, was completely submerged for the moment by the waters of bitterness closing over it.

"Have you a headache?" asked Georgie at last, after receiving a dozen random answers.

"No," answered Dolly, too miserable even to feign.

"I daresay dear Dolly is troubled at not hearing from The Limes. Indeed, we all have cause for anxiety," remarked Mrs. Dallas.

"Yes," said Dolly, just as mechanically as before.

The minutes went on. Perhaps it was the anguish of her heartbeats that made every second ticked off the clock seem like the blow of a little hammer on her temples. Dick re-entered only just in time to save her from a burst of weeping. The instant he appeared she rose involuntarily, and announced that she must go.

"So soon," said Mrs. Dallas.

"Yes," answered Dolly, simply. "Good bye."

Out of so dazed and laconic a mood there was no explanation to be had evidently.

They kissed her, wished her good-bye, sent their love to Winifred. Dick accompanied her to the ante-chamber and gave her her sunshade, then held out his hand in farewell. Dolly put her slender, ice-cold fingers into his grasp, and raised to his face eyes so frankly, so unconsciously mournful, that he stepped backwards in surprise. The change in her appearance since the previous evening suddenly struck him, but with no such swift thought of its cause.

"What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No—I—good-bye—I—oh, Mr. Dallas, will you really marry an heiress when you go to America?" burst out Dolly, rushing at the central horror of her thought with all the directness of a child.

Dick stood dumbfounded, and his silence falling on the poor little listener's heart like the stone of a sepulchre entombing all her hopes, she bent her face upon her hands and fairly sobbed aloud.

"Why!" exclaimed Dick, as soon as he recovered his voice, "I did not know—I never thought—please don't cry—marry an heiress? Heiresses are not so plentiful. Besides, I think I feel more like—now look up—you'll spoil your eyes—why, what a dear little thing you are!" And Dick, feeling that his surprise, his emotion, his disjointed phrases landed him in no satisfactory conclusion; vividly conscious, moreover, of Dolly's prettiness, and attracted by the very abyss of imprudence into which, as a Dallas, he was bound to plunge, abruptly stopped speaking, and folded the trembling form of the weeping girl to his side.

At this interesting moment, almost before Dolly's tears had time to change into a sob of rapture, there came a sharp ring at the bell. Dick, hastily releasing his companion, went to open the door and found Winifred on the threshold, looking rather excited. But, observant always, she was quick to notice the signs of recent agitation in Dolly, and stayed her speech to glance swiftly at Dick.

"Oh, Winifred!" exclaimed Dolly, smiling and breathless, "Mr. Dallas has got an appointment and is going to America."

"To America?" echoed Winifred. Then understanding, or thinking she understood, that this event was likely to bring Dolly's affairs to a crisis, she smiled with frank pleasure. "I am so glad."

"You are very kind," said Dick, with a quiet irony not far removed from bitterness. But Winifred, previously full of other thoughts, for once failed to catch the meaning of his tone.

"Dick," she said, a moment later, turning to him, "read this puzzling telegram that I have just received from Mark. Gertrude has run away from The Limes."

"Run away? Again! There is a tendency to repeat themselves about my sister's solutions of her difficulties," said Dick. But in

spite of this sneer, in itself not unkindly spoken, he looked grave after glancing at the telegram, and added, "This should be answered, and I must go to England."

"To-night?"

"To-night I cannot; to-morrow will be time enough."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH MARK MAKES DISCOVERIES.

MRS. HATHERLEY and Florence, the very day after Gertrude's disappearance, betook themselves to London, unable to bear the monotony of The Limes, now that the excitement of the arch-enemy's presence was removed. "Mark," as they expressed it, "was too horribly 'grumpy';" and, indeed, he was not cheerful. Beset with creditors, worried with letters, feeling each hour widen the gulf between himself and all the pride, the hopes and illusions of the past, he spent many hours when love of work alone stood between him and despair. He was resolute to bring his father's affairs into order, and to redeem, as far as his own effort could do it, the blighted honour of his name. But the task was no easy one, and brought endless bitterness to his noble nature.

The arrival of Richard Dallas was welcome to him: not only because he came straight from Winifred—knew what she was doing—must speak of her unasked. Moreover, Dick was an agreeable companion, and had the tact to keep his affectations in the background when with sensible men. Concern, also, about Gertrude made him really serious, and attuned him to Mark's present mood. The result of their first consultation was the advertisement in the *Times*: which, as we know, produced nothing.

"It is more the responsibility of her disappearance than any great uneasiness that oppresses me," said Mark one morning. "After all, as a married woman with some experience of the world, she does, presumably, know how to take care of herself."

"Naturally. But when her money runs out, she will commit any act of extravagant folly rather than confess herself in the wrong, and ask help."

"Even should she have recovered from her scare about the state of things here?"

"Even so. I believe that the one motive power of all my sister's actions is what may be called the love of adventure."

"You do not then believe in the existence of this uncle?"

"What uncle?"

"Surely I explained to you that at the inquest Lady Hatherley stated that the mysterious stranger from Harwich who, as we suppose helped her to convert the jewels into money, was her uncle."

Dick made a gesture of surprise. "No doubt you mentioned it

but my head was bewildered with all the other details. Did she give him any name?"

"Yes; a name so well known, at one time, in our family, that it alone made me doubt the genuineness of her tale. She called him Ralph Mercer."

"By Jove! Of course it is then our reprobate—my good little step-mother's scamp of a brother. He was the only scamp that had appeared in the Mercer family for generations, and consequently plunged a large assortment of maiden aunts, and half-sisters of domestic tendencies into the greatest possible consternation. He decamped to America, in comparative youth, with a sum of money borrowed, without the ceremony of asking, from his employers, and hardly large enough to have made the adventure worth its risks."

"Yes," assented Mark, "and was only not prosecuted because those same employers had consideration for his family."

"They were in some way related, I think," answered Dick. "I know their name was Redfern, and that was my step-mother's maiden name. When she first married my father, and I was quite a little fellow, I remember this Ralph used to turn up at irregular intervals, always hungry, always needy, and to the same extent mysterious. The mother, ever anxious to think well of everybody, was greatly worried about him, but we have of late years not been favoured by him with any signs of life."

"Then you know nothing of his recent relations with Lady Hatherley?"

"Nothing whatever. Where can Gerty have met him?"

Mark smoked for a little while in silence. "If he has been living by his wits, he may not be quite unknown to the police. In that case, to discover his present abode would be easy."

"Stay," said Dick. "Let us wait before applying to the secret intelligence department. Perhaps we shall get an answer to our advertisement." Mark agreed, more than half divining Richard's thought. Ralph Mercer was by no means the kind of relative upon whom it is advisable to turn the strong light of publicity; and Gertrude, in her mingled audacity and inexperience, might be more compromised in some undertaking of his than her family would care to make known.

The inquest on Sir John was resumed. But all the coroner's acuteness failing to discover anything, the jury finally gave a verdict of "Death from natural causes." To be sure, Lady Hatherley's disappearance was not accounted for; but it was *the only* suspicious circumstance: "One swallow does not make a summer;" and the first keen edge had worn off the public appetite for scandal.

This happy result attained, Mark repeated the advertisement; but with no effect. Meanwhile Mrs. Dallas wrote daily in growing alarm, and even Mr. Dallas began to show signs of anxiety. Consequently the two young men found themselves at last with no choice but to

apply to a confidential enquiry office ; and within a very short time they thence learnt all that the reader has known before them. That is to say, they were informed that Lady Hatherley, on quitting The Limes, had taken refuge with her uncle, and had, the next day or so, been placed by him in the household of Mr. Graham. As Gertrude's interview with Dr. Kenyon had taken place but a few hours before the despatch of these particulars, her sudden departure was not included in the information. Therefore: "The best thing to be done is to call at Mr. Graham's and see Lady Hatherley," suggested Mark.

"The very best." And it was so settled. The letter had reached them by the morning's post ; and two o'clock found them at Mr. Graham's door.

"Is Lady Hatherley in?" asked Mark, of the servant.

She stared. "Nobody of that name here, sir." Mark and Richard exchanged glances, and the latter bit his lip. An alias, and all the mystery it suggested, would be just like Gertrude's folly.

"This is Mr. Graham's house, is it not?—Is he at home?"

He was, and they were ushered into the drawing-room, where the maid left them while she went to carry their cards to Mr. Graham.

He came quickly—wonderfully so for him—and was accompanied by Dr. Kenyon, under whose gravity, a person knowing him very well might have detected some excitement.

"Mr. Dallas?" began Mr. Graham, enquiringly, his glance travelling from one to the other of his visitors, as Richard stepped forward. "Miss Dallas's brother, I presume?"

"Yes. Is my sister in?"

"In? She is gone."

"Gone?"

"She went yesterday. We were very sorry to lose her, my son and I; but she would go. She said she had received bad news and must return to Paris. I suppose she knows her own affairs best, but the suddenness of her decision annoyed and disturbed my son," added Mr. Graham, with a slight suspicion of testiness in his accent and manner. "She suited Ned. There are not many people who do please him, poor lad! and I had been a long time making up my mind to have a stranger in the house. Perhaps she found something to complain of; if so, I wish she had said it. Do you know why she left?" wound up Mr. Graham, suddenly turning to Dick.

"I think we had better tell all the circumstances. Will you do it, Hatherley?" said the young man. And thus admonished Mark related the whole story, explaining Gertrude's position, her identity, her wild scare at the inquest, the perfect groundlessness of her fears; and so on, Mr. Graham listening all the while with an irascibility, which was so largely mixed with sympathy for Gertrude, that he could hardly be polite to Mark. According to his views it must be somebody's fault that such a nice young woman had been wrongfully

suspected and needlessly alarmed, and Mark being the most prominent of her connections whom Mr. Graham could lay hold of at the moment, seemed to him the most obvious person to attack.

"Tut-tut! Your father's wife! Surely she might have been protected from such insult," said the unreasonable Egyptologist.

"I am afraid that in the late development of this business I am the most to blame, after all," quietly interposed Dr. Kenyon.

"You?"

"I. This lady—Miss Dallas, as we have been accustomed to call her—was, you must confess, Mr. Graham, introduced to you by a suspicious character."

"Suspicious!" interrupted Mr. Graham. "The best fellow in the world! Amused Ned by the hour at Brighton."

Dr. Kenyon shrugged his shoulders. "You never seemed to know much about Mr. Mercer, and, if I may so express it, Mr. Mercer seemed to know less about himself. He introduces to you a lady, young, beautiful, well-educated, who brings no references, but, on the other hand, makes no kind of objection to entering a household with no mistress at the head of it."

"And where was the harm of that?" again broke in Mr. Graham, looking rather red, too; for, like most scholars, he was as prudish as an elderly spinster.

"No harm whatever," resumed the doctor, coolly. "If I bring forward these facts, it is simply because they furnish the only explanation of my conduct. In an evil moment of leisure, I read in the *Times* an advertisement for a missing lady, whose description seemed to me to correspond singularly to Miss Dallas. I showed it to her. She grew troubled—a little angry. Would, however, explain nothing, and stated an immediate intention of leaving. And the very same day she put that intention into execution."

"And why the deuce could you not tell all this before?" exclaimed Mr. Graham.

"The lady had chosen her own solution to her difficulties. I was not bound to convey to you my suspicions—which, indeed, have turned out in a great measure unnecessary," said Dr. Kenyon, who made the admission in a tone of curious resentment. An observant listener might have concluded that Dr. Kenyon was divided between interest in Gertrude and some annoyance with himself for the feeling.

"I should like you to tell your sister that this house is always open to her," presently resumed Mr. Graham, again addressing Dick. "She made herself most agreeable, and Ned misses her sadly. For his sake alone I should be delighted to have her back again, and I should be glad also if she gave me a less selfish reason for welcoming her, by being willing to return."

"You are very kind, but ——" Dick paused, and glanced at Mark.

"I hope Lady Hatherley will not fancy herself obliged again to be a companion," observed the latter, gravely.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Graham, looking rather embarrassed. "You told me, of course, that she is your father's widow, but I have been so surprised by the strangeness and unexpectedness of all this story, that I do not think I have quite realised every point. I—ah—very stupid of me!—Hatherley? I knew some Hatherleys once, thirty-five years ago, in America."

"Those were, perhaps, my father's cousins," said Mark, interested. His late necessary examination of many family papers had given him a fuller knowledge of the Hatherley history, and had awakened in him a curiosity to know more about those kinsfolk, in whose hearts, and round whose names, so much bitterness had raged. That long dead-and-gone Esther Hatherley, who had so irrevocably alienated her brother, Mark's grandfather, by her marriage—had especially attracted the young man's imagination. For among his father's old letters were some written when Sir John was himself in America. There were some subtle touches of a soft feeling, almost of tenderness, in the way he wrote of his cousins, especially of one of them, the eldest, Margaret, with whom it was very plain that old Mr. Hatherley, not without some show of reason, had suspected his son, John, of being in love.

Mark, remembering that his own mother's name was Margaret, had thought that possibly some resemblance in more than the name to his first love, had determined his father's final choice of a wife. Mark recalled his mother very distinctly, her ethereal beauty, her shadowy grace; the charm of her gentleness, the pathos of her affliction; all had remained to him as the most graciously mournful of memories. He had felt her loss as keenly as a reserved and sensitive child could feel; he had cherished the recollection of her all the more that his father had seemed very quickly to forget her. And nobody that Mark had ever met seemed to have known his mother, or was able to tell him anything about her. This mystery, if mystery it was, heightened the poetry of her image in her son's mind; and lately, in reading of this other "Margaret," he had seemed, although he knew it must be fancy, to gain a clearer image of his mother. He sat silent for a few moments, then addressed Mr. Graham:

"These Hatherleys that you knew in America, sir; may I ask where they were living?"

"In Philadelphia."

"Then they were my cousins. There were several daughters?"

"Yes: extremely pretty girls. The eldest, Margaret, was beautiful, but she was unfortunately deaf and dumb."

Mark looked so unaccountably startled that Mr. Graham paused for an instant in sheer surprise, then continued:

"I was a schoolboy still in those days, but I remember thinking her singularly lovely; and there was a curious story about her which interested me. She had been, so to speak, only *lent* to her family."

"Lent?"

"Yes. She had become deaf, and consequently dumb, through some accident; I forget the details, but I know it happened when she was only about two years old. Her father, who up to that moment had adored her as his first-born, took up a most unnatural aversion to her. One has heard of men who possess this shrinking from physical imperfection; sometimes it runs in families."

"It apparently ran very much in ours," said Mark. "My grandfather I know had it, to the same extent probably as his brother."

"Ah! in the case of poor Margaret Hatherley the consequences were less evil than might have been feared. For she touched the heart of a rich eccentric widower, who adopted her and gave her his name. And as the years went on his love for her became a kind of monomania, so that he could not bear people to know that she was not his child. He tried in every way to separate her from her family, and only lent her, as I have said, for a brief space to her dying mother, who had not seen her for years, who had pined for the sight of her, and after many supplications had at last wrung from Mr. Lyndon the permission to see her for a few weeks before he carried her off for ever to England."

"Lyndon! Did you say Lyndon?" interrupted Mark, pale with unusual emotion.

"Yes, that was his name. He really was a little mad. He had never told this girl that she was not his daughter, and would not allow her father and mother to reveal their relationship to her. They were, in her eyes, to pass as great friends of his. I remember how pathetic it was to watch the yearning glance with which Mrs. Hatherley sometimes followed her unconscious daughter, who was very sweet and gentle, but perhaps a little cold; or, possibly, it was not coldness but only her affliction, which always seemed to make her the denizen of another sphere. Her adopted father lived only for her. And I remember her visit to her family was cut short by his jealousy. A young man—also a Hatherley—came out from England, and fell in love with Margaret. He was very indignant at old Lyndon's pretensions, and always said the girl should be enlightened. And he wanted to marry her, but the old man carried her away, and what happened afterwards I never heard."

Mark made no answer: his heart was too full of bitterness. Mr. Graham thought him absent-minded, and turned to Richard. An animated conversation between himself and the latter, in which Dr. Kenyon joined, began about Etruscan coins, theories as to Etruscan speech, and so on: subjects on which Dick was always interested, and interesting. Mark, meanwhile, sat quite mute, for the blow which he had just received was a terrible one. He knew now that all the wealth which his father had first employed, then squandered, and all that by which he himself, in countless advantages of education and up-bringing had benefited, had been obtained through a deception as elaborate as it was base; for even though

in the end Mr. Hatherley might so far have forgiven John's marriage as to leave him a portion of his money, he certainly would never have disinherited his other children in his eldest son's favour, had he known whom that son had taken to wife. He would have objected to Margaret Hatherley on many grounds: first, because, through her mother and (more distantly) through her father she was doubly John's cousin; next because of her affliction; and, finally, because she was the daughter of a man whom he hated.

Mark was proudly and fastidiously upright, with an uprightness that had, perhaps, some alloy of arrogance. It was, therefore, cruelly humiliating to him to feel that for long years his father had wronged and defrauded the people whom Mark, in the midst of his care for them, had disliked and despised. Mrs. Hatherley, Florence, Mary Russell—he had meant to do what he could for them and then dismiss them from his life: now five minutes' conversation—the reminiscences of a stranger—had sufficed to transform these dependents on his bounty into claimants for a retribution far beyond his means! Well—it was a duty the more, a further sacrifice exacted from him—the consummation of his ruin; not one coin of such ill-gotten gains should cling to his fingers—on this he was resolved—and, having once accepted this conclusion, he put all regret away from him with a characteristic, grave serenity. He rose then to go; apologised for his intrusion, and promised to give Mr. Graham news of Lady Hatherley as soon as he should know anything himself.

On getting back to The Limes they received a visit from Mrs. Burton. She had lately been in a state of great exhilaration, having been taken up and patronised by a distant and semi-aristocratic connection of Mr. Burton's, a certain Hon. Mrs. Shirley, who, for reasons of her own, had invited the Vicar's pretty wife to spend a fortnight with her in London. The invitation, coming as it did unexpectedly, had so scattered Mrs. Burton's wits (all that portion of them, that is, not concentrated upon making the most of Mrs. Shirley) that she had actually started for May-fair, leaving behind the half-finished budget of Gertrude's iniquities, that she had been compiling for Winifred. From London she had only found time to despatch sundry little billets full of rapturous hints at one thing, bewildering inuendoes at another, and a forest of notes of admiration in every page. Back at Elmsleigh she had completed the first budget, supplemented it with a further one descriptive of "*dear, refined* Mrs. Shirley," and came now to glean fresh news, if possible, from Dick Dallas.

"How d'ye do?" she said, with an air of languid elegance, copied from her late surroundings. "Lady Hatherley has written, I presume? No! Gone back to Paris, you think? Ah! I hope my dear daughter——Have I heard from Winifred lately, you say? No; she does not often write. It is the fashion of the present day to be a little forgetful of parents. But I don't complain; she is my sweet child all the same. Dear Mrs. Shirley is most anxious to make her acquaintance."

"Who is Mrs. Shirley?" enquired Dick, provokingly.

"The Honourable Mrs. Shirley, a daughter of Lord Walrush, a most charming, elegant, spirituelle woman; but I think it is very likely you have never heard of her," answered Mrs. Burton, in a tone of ineffable impertinence. "Her acquaintance will be invaluable to my darling child. Winifred is naturally most refined, but her surroundings of late have *not* been everything I could wish."

"I dare say Gerty has gone to her now," remarked Dick, casually. Mrs. Burton gave a theatrical start.

"I hope not. I mean, of course, that Winifred will give no advice.—Considering her youth and inexperience she is perhaps a little fond of advising; and now that I am not with her, she cannot be too careful. Besides, her life is an austere one: she is devoted to her art. I wish her to be devoted to her art."

"You used always to complain of that," exclaimed Mark, gruffly. But Mrs. Burton ignored this remark. People with inconvenient memories were really too ill-bred!

"Are you soon leaving Elmsleigh?" she asked.

"As soon as everything is sold off. But I shall not go without calling to wish you good-bye, Mrs. Burton. When a fellow is ruined, his chief consolation lies in friendship," answered Mark, with very grim humour.

Mrs. Burton, lost in dreamy contemplation of the prospect from the window, apparently did not hear him. When she took her leave, Dick, opening the door for her, observed airily: "I shall be sure to let you know what news Gerty gives of Winifred."

An elaborate little shudder at his familiarity; a glance from half-closed eyelids, that took him in from the crown of his head to the tips of his boots, and expressed her full sense of his insignificance, were all Mrs. Burton's reply.

"Of all the insufferable pieces of affectation and pretence ——" began Dick, when she was fairly gone.

"Don't waste good abuse on her, my dear fellow; she is not worth it," interrupted Mark.

Later in the evening, a diversion was caused to their thoughts by the entrance of a servant with a telegram. "From Paris," said Mark, and tore it open.

(To be continued.)

A CURIOUS PEOPLE.

IN fitting out expeditions and sending out explorers to the uttermost ends of the earth, we have missed a people who come under our very noses, and in such frequent and sometimes daily contact with our household, as materially to interfere with our comfort and ease.

A people strong : the strongest, in proportion to their size, of any created being, not excepting the elephant and gorilla. Intelligent too, with much inventive genius and equal cleverness in execution. Yet withal so differently constituted from ourselves, that in bringing our observation to bear upon their being, we feel as if dropped into another planet, and were contemplating inhabitants whose form, appearance, manners and customs, could never have been conceived by the wildest imagination.

In the first place—to take any member of the race—he is not a biped like a man, nor a quadruped like a horse ; but he has six legs, the two foremost being indiscriminately used as arms or legs, as occasion may require. His face has three eyes, disposed in a triangle on the forehead, with which he keeps the sharpest look-out, with a power of vision marvellously far-reaching. He has no nose, and therefore cannot smell ; nor is he gifted with ears. Consequently he is both deaf and dumb, and is reduced to communicate with his fellows through the language of touch, and would no doubt have formed an alphabet of fingers like our own deaf and dumb, but that his forelegs are in constant requisition for walking and running. But kind nature has compensated for this deficiency, by giving him two long, moveable, sensitive fingers planted in his forehead, with which he communicates fully and freely as his will may dictate.

In appearance they are dark in complexion ; though even in this they vary from intense black like the negroes, to red like the Indians, tawny like the Egyptians, and even white like ourselves. In figure they are slim, but quite as anomalous in their form as their face is in feature. They have no neck, so to speak ; not such as we have, joining head to chest ; but they have a long crooked waist which joins the chest to the body, and this takes the form of an inverted *f*.

Fancy such a monster coming right up against one !

What a different notion of beauty these people must have, and if they have a school of design, how strange must be their line and colours !

But I have not described half the wonders. They are a sociable people amongst themselves, and form a most orderly community ; so laborious and foreseeing, that even Solomon kindly bestowed eulogiums on them, and held them up as an example to his own subjects.

Their government is monarchical, the strangest in the world. There is none like it, for the sceptre is only given to females, and as marriage

is a royal privilege confined to the sovereign alone, she, the queen, is the only matron in the kingdom, and is, besides, the one, and only, mother of her whole people. Men are despised here because they are given to idleness; and, therefore, when they become useless from age, indisposition, or other causes, they are put to death as criminals. There are only a few of the male sex born within a given epoch. On the other hand women are the dominant sex. They are the majority, the strong, the intelligent, the active, the great workers and contrivers in this most strange and curious nation. It is still the women who nurse, feed, and cater for the young, all born of the queen mother; also who educate them and bring them up. It is the women who sow, reap, garner up stores for the winter, who build cities and walls, highways, covered ways, tunnels, and smooth roads; who lay out pastures and cultivate grounds, and form altogether a people of such surprising faculties that they have at length attracted the attention of some of our greatest men of the day, and would surely have come into notice long ago, but for their diminutive size. So small, that the Lilliputians of Swift might crush them under foot like sand. So small that it requires very close attention indeed to ascertain their exact form. So small that it is only by the persistent use of the microscope that one obtains any certain knowledge of their habits and manners.

It is not only what our cleverest philosophers have written about them, not from hearsay alone, that I speak, but from what I myself have seen in peregrinations in other lands.

We were travelling in that land of teeming prodigious life, Central America, and were camped in a glade bordering a grand old virgin forest, so marvellously rich in strange forms and colours of vegetable life that we should have lingered long in this spot to admire, but that we were driven by a sudden shower to take shelter in a deserted shed or house, left, probably, by some planter who had migrated to another spot: a not unusual case. The roof, resting on two stone walls, was covered with wooden shingles, on which the rain came pattering down with a noise like thunder. There was nothing for it but to wait till it was over. There we sat, dismal and woe-begone, some of the party squat on the folds of a spread hammock, others on bags which the mules had carried, and one of us on a three-legged stool, most opportunely fished out from a dark corner where it had lain hidden. There we sat, contemplating the rainfall outside and the walls within, one of which had a crack in it a good foot in width at the bottom. But running up in an oblique line away to the left hand side towards the top, it became smaller and smaller as it rose, till from a mere line it vanished to nothing. This crack had been the work of an earthquake, a frequent occurrence in those regions, and been left in that state by the last tenant when he flitted.

We sat watching this crack, and, for want of something better

to do, commenting and surmising, when suddenly our attention was caught by some live thing, as it appeared to us, issuing from a hole in the ground close up under the wall, midway between the crack and the right hand corner. In another minute it had beat upwards, and was taking the direction up the wall. Out it came, longer and longer. We thought it would never stop unfolding. Was it a snake? Everyone started at the bare thought. We watched it at a respectful distance.—No! it was a huge scolopendra, full a foot and half long. We have these creatures in our own European gardens, but they are small, perhaps three inches at most. But this one was a monster, and the whole party were instantly on their feet to give it chase and knock it over, when someone uttered a note of surprise and invited us to stop and examine its mode of progress.

I should explain, that the natural gait of this reptile when in movement is serpentine; its multitudinous legs rising and falling in quick succession, like a series of small waves, very pretty to look at when near. But this creature did not seem to use its legs at all, but slid up the wall as if pulled up by some invisible string. Everyone exclaimed with surprise, and on closer inspection the riddle was solved.

The monster was dead, and was impelled up the wall not by a string, but by the serried ranks of thousands of little black ants fringing the sides, which they shoved up by slanting their bodies, as we ourselves should under the same circumstances; also at the head which they were pulling, and at the tail which they were pushing; and all this with an unanimity of aim and action, and an intelligence of the work they had undertaken, and all in so perfect and beautiful order that it won the admiration of our whole party. No set of human beings could do it better.

They had already gained half way up the hut. On went the procession, swift and smooth, without a break or pause, till they came to the fault I have already described in the wall. The crack here measured a full inch wide; they could not bridge it over. They halted, and I, moved by the most intense curiosity, mounted on the three-legged stool to watch.

It was then I discovered that on the back of the dead reptile were stationed some half-dozen loose ants, running about hither and thither, in a state of the greatest agitation and excitement, looking down at the workers on this side then on the opposite side—then along the body to the head—back again to the tail and so on; while one little fellow, not a whit different from the rest, kept stationary on the extreme highest point of the head. He was evidently the captain and commander-in-chief: and though not differing from the others in form and colour as far as we could see, yet no doubt elected for the position from his superior intelligence. The rent here was so wide, so impossible to get over, that I fully expected they would have let go their booty and it had fallen to the ground. But not a hair's-breadth did they budge—the stout-hearted

little creatures held on as steady as our own troops in battle, immovable as a post ; and this for some fraction of a minute. Then at some sign of command, invisible and unintelligible to us, the whole procession moved backwards (that is downwards) for about the space of a foot. Then came another halt, and then again the whole body recommenced their march upwards ; only this time it took a sloping line parallel with the crack in the wall, evidently aiming at the place where the rent dwindled away to nothing. And they reached it, too ; they crossed it ; they came to the top, and we saw the body of the dead reptile bending over the top of the wall, as it gradually disappeared under the rafters which supported the roof.

The whole scene impressed itself on my mind as one to ponder and reflect upon. For the movement showed not only a skilful combination of forces, of rare generalship on the part of the commander, worthy of a human hero—but an obedience on the part of the workers which might rival the best drilled army in the world ; and we cannot but recognise in those small creatures an amount of intelligence which may rank on a par with many nations and people which we call human.

At another time I witnessed a scene not less interesting. It was a battle. It took place on the broad slab outside our window. The fight itself was over ; and the red ants, who were the invaders, were taking the black ants prisoners and carrying them off as slaves. How did they do this ?

They did not chain or handcuff their prisoners as we should. They took an easier method. They had possessed themselves of a thread from a spider's web, portions of which they adroitly tied round the body of the captive, while a red ant, each one holding an end, pulling it with equal force and at equal distance, thus managed to avoid the sting of the prisoner, as they dragged it along ; unmindful of its unavailing struggles and wriggles to escape.

I was wondering how they managed to tie the thread round the prisoner's body, when I spied a little group of red ants busy over the insensible body of a black ant forced in a corner, and I suppose paralysed with the injected burning poison of their conquerors' sting. And so it happens that Nature offers to the candid student new wonders every day, unfolding to our view proofs incontestable that she dispenses her gifts irrespective of size, form, class of life and even race. And we are moved, in thinking of the Great Creator of all these wonders, to exclaim with awe and reverence at every step of our way, even when contemplating so small a thing as the ant.

M. F. W.

FLOSS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MRS. JERNINGHAM'S JOURNAL."

"IS there a doctor in the house?"

These words were uttered by a girl's voice, and sounded, to my ears, in eager, piteous tones.

I was just going to begin my dinner, and had stuck the fork into the breast of a roast duck, preparatory to transferring the best part of that very tempting bird to my plate. I had been travelling all day, and was much more inclined, at the present moment, to eat, drink, and be comfortable, than for any active employment. My quarters were not bad, being in a well-known little inn, at L——, in Guernsey, to which island I had run over on business. After having transacted it, I was taking mine ease by exploring the whole island in the shortest possible time, and tiring myself to death thereby.

"Is there a doctor in the house?" repeated the girl's voice, and this time the accents were impatient, almost despairing.

I was dining alone in the coffee-room, the door of which stood open into the hall from whence the girl's voice sounded, the fork remained in the duck's breast, and my hand suspended above it, while I listened for the reply.

"No, there isn't; but there is Dr. le Noir in the village, in the first street to your right"

"Dr. le Noir is out. He won't be back to-day. Oh, he will die! he will die! What shall I do?" cried the young, despairing voice.

Up I jumped, and left my dinner.

"I am a doctor," I said, appearing at the open door of the room, with my napkin in my hand. She sprang forward.

"Oh, I am glad!" she cried. "Come with me this minute, or he will die. Do not lose an instant." She said this with the utmost imperiousness.

"Only to get my hat," I replied, meekly, quite subdued by her tyranny. Or was it her wonderful beauty that subdued me? for indeed it was a vision of most extraordinary beauty that greeted my eyes as I entered the hall.

A young girl, not more than sixteen or seventeen years old, in a white frock, with a black lace mantilla over her shoulders and head; beneath this mantilla, coil after coil of golden hair—real gold, for it was not brown or auburn at all—twisted round and round her head. And then again, under this magnificent amount of hair, such a face! Slightly oval and rather small, a complexion of milk and roses—if ever that similitude could be fairly used for a complexion—delicate, charming little features, a mouth that, having once seen, one could

not take one's eyes off, with its pretty dimples, and cleft chin. Eyebrows—I am always very particular about eyebrows—a golden brown, many shades darker than the hair. And then, as she turned her eyes full upon me, in her eagerness, I declare I was startled, and I am not sure that at the first moment I was agreeably startled. For, though they were everything that eyes—taken by themselves as eyes—should be, in that face, and with those surroundings of colour, they were almost incongruous: at least, at first sight they made you jump. They were almond shaped, brilliant, soft, liquid; everything, that is, most beautiful in eyes; but they were dark—quite dark; not even hazel, but deep brown; and their lashes were nearly black. But they ought to have been blue—the eyes I mean; there can be no doubt about that; and not even violet blue; china blue—baby blue is what they ought to have been; and I actually did almost jump when I saw them.

However, be they what colour they might, there was no resisting them in their eagerness, their hope, their despair; and having received one look from them, I was in as great a hurry as she could be. I seized my hat, and cried, "Come along." At which she instantly set off, and ran out of the house, and I ran after her.

Thus we proceeded for some way, till she, if not I, lost breath, and then perforce we slackened our pace.

"What is the matter with him?" I asked.

"He has had a *dreadful* fall. He is hurt."

"How long ago? Has any one attended to him? Is he sensible?"

"Early this morning. He came to me. He could hardly stand or speak. I got him to bed. Someone had tied up his shoulder, but it began to bleed, and he said I must call a doctor. I had *wanted* to do it before. He wouldn't let me, but now he is as eager for one as I am.—Oh! oh!"

All this was said in little broken sentences, partly from want of breath, and partly from anxiety and flurry of spirits; and the "Oh, oh," at the end was the most pitiful sound I ever heard.

"Well, well," I replied, soothingly, "a hurt in the shoulder is nothing dreadful; we'll soon set him up."

She gave me the sweetest smile, and such a flashing glance of her astonishing eyes, that again they really made me jump. As she turned her face towards me, that she might thus thank me, I noticed—I hardly know why I noticed it, but it somehow made an impression on me—a soft little brown mole on the left cheek, below the temple: a thorough beauty spot.

Meantime, she led me rapidly on, till we were more than a mile from my inn. We had long left anything that could be called a high road, and, after crossing fields, were in a narrow lane; till, in a lonely wooded spot, with a view of the blue sea stretched below it, we came on a farmhouse, snugly nestled under a hill.

She led me straight in, through a sort of empty hall—I don't think it was a kitchen—up a staircase, and then, without a moment's pause, ran before me into a large, low-ceiling bedroom.

"I have one, dearest—I have brought him. Oh! how are you? How white you look!"

Verily he did look white. I followed closely behind her, and beheld an old-fashioned tent bedstead at the far end of the chamber, with check curtains, within which lay a young man. He could not be more than one and twenty, and he was a handsome fellow—or, at least, he would be such, I felt sure, when in a little less cadaverous condition. But his face was as white as the pillow on which his head was laid, and the dark hair and whiskers made it appear still more ghastly. He looked like a man who had lost a great quantity of blood, and he glared about him in that peculiar, restless, asking way (with a pair of very fine dark eyes) which may be noticed in cases where there has been violent hæmorrhage, whether of an internal or external nature. I did not like his looks, and was afraid there must be a good deal the matter.

"Oh, all right," he cried, "I am delighted you are come. Now, my own darling, you must leave us for a minute"—— to the girl.

"No, Charlie; whatever I do, I can't do that. I *can't* leave you *don't* send me away."

"Well, my sweetest, look out of the window at that end of the room, then. I can't have you see ugly bruises. I will call you the minute you can be of use. Look out now; you *must* do what I tell you."

"Yes, dear," she replied, quite meekly, and, turning her back on him, obeyed his order.

He directed his quick restless eyes towards me then, with a world of meaning in them, which I could not in the least understand, and said, in a raised voice, still looking at me with all this significance:

"I had a fall—a nasty fall—from a bit of cliff, you know, and fell somehow on a sharp stone, as you'll see. It's bleeding like the very deuce!"

He dropped his voice, as he uttered the last words, and, still keeping his eyes fixed on me, drew down the bed-clothes with his right hand. Removing some cloths saturated in blood from the left shoulder, displayed a neat little round hole, as evidently made by a bullet as possible.

"It only began to bleed half an hour ago," he said, as our eyes met, and his commanded silence.

"I see!" I answered very slowly. "Is—*it*—in it?"

"The stone?" he cried hastily; "no, it is not. I got it out a little while back."

And, in a sly, surreptitious way, he lifted a bullet and showed it me under the clothes.

I was very much surprised at the quantity of blood that had been

lost, as bullet wounds are never accompanied by much bleeding; but I soon perceived that there was a cut by the side.

"What's this?" I cried. "This is where the blood comes from."

"I tried to cut it out myself," he answered, with a rather shame-faced look, and a little burst of laughter; and then he fainted away.

I was not sorry he had fainted, as it enabled me, without hurting him, to ascertain the extent of the mischief. I dressed the wounds, and did all that was necessary, stopping the bleeding without much difficulty. I then recovered him with brandy from my own pocket flask, and all without his obedient sister, or—what?—could this young creature be his wife?—stirring from her post at the window, or knowing anything about either the fainting fit or the wound.

He opened his eyes, and looked strangely about him.

"Good gracious!" he said; "what *is* the matter? What business have you in the room? Floss—my darling—where's Floss?"

She was at the bedside in an instant.

"Here, dearest, here; can I do anything for you?"

"Oh, I remember!" he said, slowly; "no, my pet, you can't do anything; I'm all right."

And his eyes interrogated mine, as if asking whether he *was* all right.

"Yes," I answered then; "you'll do very well, only you must keep yourself quite quiet, you know. You mustn't stir hand or foot, and you must have somebody to nurse you."

"I shall nurse him," cried the young girl, proudly.

"Excuse me; you are too young—and inexperienced. Have you anyone with you?—your parents, perhaps?" I spoke doubtfully, and said the words as a test.

They both laughed, and she blushed all over her pretty face, while even my patient's white cheeks had a sudden colour in them.

"Not exactly," he replied drily; "we are—alone."

Then they exchanged looks, and their souls were in their eyes.

"I had better try and get a nurse from the village," I said.

"Indeed, no!" cried the girl. "No one shall nurse him but me,—shall they, Charlie? Oh, say that they shall not.—I'll go back to school if you don't!"

He laughed again. There was a gay, careless look about him, notwithstanding his suffering state, that made laughter seem natural.

"Hush!" he interrupted with a look of amusement, but with a trifle of anxiety in it, also, as she finished her speech. "But indeed I think"—to me—"we had best do without the nurse; it would be awkward; it wouldn't *do*—would it, Flossy?"

A whole volume of tenderness was in his voice when he addressed her.

"It would *not* do," she answered, with a half laugh, and another glance that met and mingled with his in its loving significance.

"Besides which, no creature shall nurse you but myself. I wonder at

anyone proposing such a thing," she added, with some indignation, and then a side flash out of her eyes at me, which made me feel like a culprit.

"Well," I said, "it may last some time, this nursing, and I think a sister or a friend, or a professional nurse, would be a help. There is nothing to be done to-night but to keep quiet, and I will send you a composing draught. I never travel without a small medicine chest, in case of accident, so I can make up something that will do."

"My dear Charlie, what can you want with a composing draught?" asked the girl, in innocent amazement.

"He means something to make me sleep, dear," was the reply, given in an explanatory manner, which seemed to reflect on me, not her, for her want of understanding.

"As if you wouldn't sleep without it!"

"Well, you see, after a tumble, they sometimes don't sleep, do they, doctor?"

"No," I replied, shortly, "they don't."

"But I don't want anyone coming prying here from the inn or the village," said Charlie. "I think I'll take my chance of sleeping to-night, please; and to-morrow, if you kindly pay me a visit, you can bring me a lot of physic; composing draughts, and all the rest of it."

"I'll go back with him, dear, and bring you the dose," said Floss. "I'll run all the way. I'll be no time."

"No, darling; I won't have you out so late at night by yourself."

"And then he can't sleep," she said, and turned her magnificent eyes on me quite reproachfully, as if it was my fault. I immediately said I would bring back the sleeping draught myself; and, as I spoke, for the first time since I left it, I remembered the roast duck, with the fork stuck in its breast.

She took the offer rather coolly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that everyone who came across Charlie should be ready or eager to serve him. But he said very civilly: "Really that is extremely kind of you: it is a great deal of trouble to take for a stranger. But I say, doctor, how soon shall I be on my legs again?"

"In a month or six weeks, I daresay."

The young couple exchanged looks of consternation.

"But *that* isn't possible," he cried.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie! why the holidays ——" she was exclaiming, when a look from him stopped her.

"Well," I said, "I daresay you have a strong constitution, and you don't look as if you'd taken much out of yourself; if you are very careful, and there are no drawbacks, you may make wonderful progress in a fortnight."

"That's nearer the mark," he said.

"But only think of having to spend it in bed," she cried.

"It is a sell," added Charlie, and then they both laughed. After that, I took my leave, promising to return before long with the

medicine. But when I was out of reach of those astonishing eyes, I discovered that I was extremely hungry, and resolved that I would finish my dinner before I did anything else.

I blessed my landlord with a loud voice when I found that he had actually kept the said dinner hot for me, and I enjoyed my duck none the less for the little adventure which had taken me out of its presence. While I did so, I made up my mind to ask no questions of anyone about Charlie and Floss. They might be an orthodox ordinary bride and bridegroom; but even then, they would rather blush unseen for a little while; and if, as I strongly suspected, they were a runaway couple, it would be the height of cruelty to put anyone on their track, as even the most innocent questions might do. That they were gentlefolk there could be no doubt, and I had an idea that Charlie was military; though, of course, it was only an idea. But how in the world had he received that wound? and why did he make all this mystery about it? Why was the poor little bride to suppose it was a fall he suffered from, and not a wound? Was she another man's wife, and had her husband followed, and fought with Charlie? The idea was too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment. Her extreme youth, and the purity and innocence of her appearance and expression, equally forbade it. I shuddered when I thought how easily the wound, which I really hoped would prove of little consequence, might have been a dangerous one—and then the idiot trying to get out the bullet and wounding himself as he had done! Why, it might have cost him his life.

After dinner I mixed a sleeping-draught, and took it myself to the farm. The young lady ran down to the door to me; she looked quite gay now, and lovelier than ever in her recovered spirits.

"He is quite himself," she cried, "but he does not want to see you to-night. Oh, I wasn't to have said that! I was to have made some excuse, but you won't be affronted, will you?" in such a coaxing way that I would have defied St. Senanus himself to have slighted her. "I'll *make* him see you to-morrow, if it is necessary."

"I am not in the least affronted. Patients do sometimes take a dislike to their doctors," I replied, smiling down at the charming upturned face.

"Oh, it isn't *that*; he has not taken the *least* dislike to you. Why should he? I am sure you are very nice," she cried, eagerly, and then added with the utmost simplicity: "It is only that he is afraid you might ask questions."

"Well," I said, laughing outright, partly at the innocent compliment, and partly at the naive honesty with which she gave his reason; "he need not be afraid. I will come and see him to-morrow, and I will not ask him a single question—except, of course, such as concern his health."

"Thank you," she answered, very earnestly. "I'll tell him so, and then he won't mind."

But she stopped abruptly, even as she spoke, and added: "No, I

can't, for I ought not to have let out that that was the reason. I was to manage to prevent your coming up without your knowing why. How stupid I am !"

She looked at me, our eyes met, and she instantly saw the drollery of her confessions ; we both laughed.

"However," she said, "it can't be helped now. It is very awkward having anything to conceal, isn't it ? I suppose if one was older one would manage better. But there is no harm done ; you say you'll not ask questions, and you'll not tell, will you ?" very coaxingly.

"Not tell ?"

"I mean you'll not tell anybody about us ?"

And she sidled nearer to me, and looked in my face with child-like entreaty. How beautiful she was, and what wonderful eyes she had !

"No," I cried, "upon my honour as a gentleman, I won't."

"How I do like you," she said, with the sweetest naïveté. "What a number of nice people there are in the world. I can't *think* what Sarah Fielding means by saying there are not. It seems to me the more one meets the more one likes. Don't you agree with me ?"

"At this moment I certainly do."

"Oh," she said, catching my meaning more from my manner, I think, than my words, "you like *me* ?" and she blushed a little, as a child might do if you praised it.

"He will wonder why I am staying so long, so I must go back to him. Good-night, and thank you very much. You'll be sure to come to-morrow."

And so we parted. She ran upstairs, and I started home through the darkness of the summer night. I was very much interested in my young couple : in him, perhaps, more for her sake than for his own, though he was a fine young fellow, and I could not believe there was any harm in him. I wished I had looked at her left hand, and noticed whether the third finger bore the little gold circlet—so small a thing in itself, but carrying so large a history along with it.

The next morning I went to the farm-house about twelve o'clock. It was a charming day, and the walk was a pleasure in itself. Having reached my destination, I tapped at the door, and entered. She sprang from the bed, on which she had been sitting by his side, and ran forward to meet me.

"He is much better," were her eager words. "He slept as soundly as ever he could do, last night, and says his shoulder hurts him very little."

"She would sit up," said his voice from the bed. "She was drinking green tea all night to keep her awake, foolish child ! She will be tired to death, and make herself ill, by way of pleasing *me* ! Do, doctor, I beg of you, tell her not to do it again ; tell her it is not necessary."

"It will do her no harm once in a way," I said, smiling in answer

to her pleading eyes. "I have known young ladies sometimes—and so, I daresay, have you—dance a whole night through, without being one bit the worse for it next day."

She clapped her hands together at this, and even gave a little jump of joy.

"Oh, you dear doctor!" she cried. "To be sure he has! There, Charlie, you'll be a good boy now, won't you?"

But, as she clapped her hands, I saw the third finger of the left, and round it was the slender band of gold on which the weal or woe of her life depended. It was protected by a golden snake with diamond eyes, and an emerald crest. I did not like the idea of a snake twined about that wedding ring; still, my heart felt quite at rest now, and I was really glad.

With unmixed feelings of friendliness, I examined my patient, heard his account of himself, and drew my own conclusions of his state, which were quite satisfactory. "You have a capital constitution," I told him, "and will be about again sooner than I expected."

"Yes, but how soon?" asked his wife—that such a child as that should have taken the cares of wifehood upon herself!—"but how soon? He is getting so tired of it, poor fellow."

"The poor fellow must have a little patience," I replied. "Every liberty he takes with himself now will only confine him longer. A grain of patience at present will prevent the necessity of an ounce by-and-by."

"Oh, I shall do very well," he said, cheerfully. "I am very well nursed." And again the eyes met, and told their own history, so that he who ran might read.

"Have you books or papers?" I asked. "You may be read to, you know, but I am afraid there is no library within reach."

"We muster a book or two between us, don't we, Floss?"

"Oh yes, dear, I'm sure we do: I know I've got "Taylor's Holy Living and Dying," that Aunt Jane gave me: it's so beautifully bound I didn't like to leave it behind; and you've all Shelley, you know—you got him for a shilling at the railway stall, and you bought a *Queen*, too, that I haven't looked at even."

"A capital library," he cried, laughing; "we shall do very well—for you see, doctor," with a little shame-faced laugh, "we have so much to say to each other we haven't *much* time for reading."

"Of course, we've a great deal to say to each other, both of us," she cried; "when we've lived years and years in the world. Why, he's twenty one, and I am very nearly seventeen, and we've only known each other ——"

"Hush, hush!" he interrupted her, holding up a warning first finger.

"Oh, yes, dear, I'll hush; I'm always forgetting. But I know I should not just as much as you do, and mean not; it is only that I forget."

She seemed so anxious to be forgiven that he was obliged to say, "Never mind, sweetest," though he looked slightly worried—as much, I am sure, by her excuses, as by the original offence—and glanced askance at me, to see what I thought of it.

As for me, I preserved an impenetrable countenance, and, to all appearances, was as little interested as if I was visiting Mr. and Mrs. Smith Robinson, in Baker Street, or Bedford Square, and everything was as common-place and correct as it could be.

I think she took my imperturbability quite as a matter of course, and had no idea there was any reason why I might look otherwise, but Mister Charlie was better informed. I could see that he felt grateful to me, and had even no objection that I should perceive that he was so, for when I came to take leave of him, he gave me a speaking look of thanks, while he thrust a double fee into my hand.

"But, perhaps, I am still in your debt," he said; "for that was quite a sort of a surgical operation yesterday.

But I refused to take any fee; and when he pressed it on me, I explained to him that I could not do so in an accidental case of this nature, outside my usual practice.

"The fact is," I said, "I was an army surgeon in India, and though I do practise as a physician in London, it is really only because I want something to do. I heard your—wife"—I hesitated a moment on the word, and both my companions laughed a little, and blushed a good deal, when I uttered it: it was not yet a familiar word to either as applied to one of them—"I heard your wife in distress for a doctor, and unable to find one, and I came to help in an emergency if I could. By-and-by I shall have to turn you over to Dr. le Noir, and then will come the time for fees.

"Dr. le Noir be hanged," replied my patient, coolly. "But I really am exceedingly obliged to you—I am indeed. I think you have been extremely kind."

"And didn't I tell you so, Charlie," cried Floss, with airy triumph. "Did not I tell you so, when you said ——"

"Hush, hush, my love," he interrupted, hastily, and I wondered whether he would for ever be having to hush his beautiful wife, and if so, how long would he consider it as a pleasant jest.

The next morning I was expecting letters, and as there was no post-office at the little village where my inn was, I walked to fetch them myself to the post-office about a mile off—farther indeed—and at least two miles from the farm-house; yet there, to my surprise, I found my fair new friend before me.

"He is much better," she cried, ere I had time to speak, evidently thinking she could not be soon enough in giving me such news as that. "He is much better; he slept like a top all night, and was quite in a state to get his breakfast this morning."

"And how are you yourself, if you will allow me to ask you?"

"Oh, I'm perfectly well, thank you."

Indeed she looked so. The very picture of pure yet refined health, and always smiling. I thought hers was a face of the sweetest happiness I had ever beheld.

"And I hope you slept last night? for, though I took your side yesterday, I must tell you that I do not consider sleepless nights at all good for you."

"I don't want what's good for me, thank you. What is good for one is always nasty, from medicine upwards. But I really got a good deal of sleep in an arm-chair—I did indeed; and it's rather amusing sleeping in an arm chair, you *are* so puzzled when you wake to know where you are, and what you mean by it."

Surely, I thought, they must have been properly married, with a breakfast and a trousseau, and all the rest of it! Could she be so entirely free from care or regret if there had been an unsanctioned elopement? And yet, if not, why all this mystery? I was greatly puzzled about them, and my puzzle got only more intricate the more I saw of them. Who were they, and what had they done? I felt bound in honour, by a tacit understanding, for which his eyes had thanked me, to ask no questions; but I had never been so much interested by strangers, or more anxious to pierce a mystery, or less able to do so, than I was now.

The post arrived while we yet waited, and my letters were handed to me. One was given to her also. I wondered what address was on it. She looked at it eagerly.

"It is the one he expected," she said, smiling with pleasure; "how glad he'll be! It's money, and it was getting so inconvenient not having any—you can't think! But we hadn't an idea, either of us, how much we should want, and so didn't bring near enough; and in Paris he *would* buy me lots of things."

"In Paris," I said, involuntarily; perhaps here was a clue. Yet they were both of them English—possibly *she* might be French, though: there was a pretty little accentuation, not common, in her way of speaking that might be foreign.

"Mademoiselle is French, perhaps?" I asked, with a courtly Parisian bow.

"No. Mademoiselle is ——" She stopped, put her pretty hands before her mouth as to keep the words in. "Monsieur was not to ask questions," she added, roguishly, and dropped me a curtsy.

I opened my letters, and found a summons to return to London at once. My first thought was for her. I must leave these two children behind me, to whom I had been intending "to enact Providence" for a time.

I told her I must go, but that I would send Monsieur le Noir to her husband. Even in the shock and perplexity that the idea of my departure evidently gave her, she paused to blush and laugh a little, at the sound of the unaccustomed words "your husband," and repeated them softly to herself, as if they were a pleasant play.

Then she cried: "But he said he wouldn't see Monsieur le Noir. Oh, don't go away, please."

She put up her lip like a child, and looked ready to cry. I was excessively sorry, and told her so. But I could not help myself. Go I must. I walked back to the farm with her from the post-office. Charlie was refractory. He struck me as accustomed to have his own way; but, when I told him he must obey for his wife's sake, he yielded. His face expressed nothing but tenderness when I spoke of her. The boy looked honest, why should she not be happy? Why should not he always love her and treat her well?

It occurred to me I might send a telegram to London, and follow it myself in the boat that started the next night, and when I proposed this, both the young people appeared pleased.

She asked me if I had ever been in Guernsey before, and when I said no, she cried: "No more have we. Isn't it odd we came at the same time? Everything is so lucky, isn't it?"

"Yes, my getting a bul—I mean my falling off the cliff—was soundly lucky, wasn't it?" agreed her husband.

She looked a little puzzled at that, but soon conquered the difficulty, and made the circumstances fit to her theory.

"Of course, dear, that *happened*, and so it could not be helped; but then it was such luck that *he* was here,"—with the prettiest possible little sign at me—"to take care of you. But things *do* fit in so! Oh, Charlie, do you remember our first meeting?"

"It is not so very long ago, Floss, that I need forget it."

"Yes, but the wonderful way in which it was brought about?"

He looked at me, and we exchanged a smile, as we might have done at the innocent prattle of a child.

"That's telling, Floss!" he said, laughing.

"Oh, it's tiresome that everything is telling," she cried, pouting.

"How nice it will be when we *may* tell!"

"It does not do thinking, my pet—we must take our happiness, and not think, or it will be clouded."

"That is rather a—reckless view of life, is it not?" asked I.

He laughed.

"May be so," he said, "but what are the odds? My philosophy is to do what I like without thinking, for fear I should not do it, if I thought."

Floss laughed at that, and evidently considered it extremely clever.

"I don't think you'll find that philosophy answer in the long run, though," I remarked.

"Oh, why do you say that?" she cried, rather pitifully; "are not you happy? We are, and we mean to be so, always—don't we, Charlie?"

"Always and always," replied he. "Are you married, doctor?"

I was obliged to confess that I was not.

"Ah, that accounts for it," he cried, with his gay, boyish laugh : "that is why you are glum and grumpy."

"Only, I don't think he is glum and grumpy—do you, Charlie?" she said, doubtfully.

"Only a grumpy bachelor, Floss. When he marries he will begin to enjoy himself."

"Oh, Charlie, but you enjoyed yourself before you—before *that*. I could not bear to think that you had not been always happy."

She spoke so earnestly and piteously that no man in his senses could have admitted he had ever been otherwise.

After a little more chat, I left them to their happiness, which was delicious, notwithstanding his wounded shoulder. I am not at all sure that she did not think that the fall had been sent in order that they might have the pleasure of nursing and being nursed.

I thought about them a great deal that evening, and on the following day I took Monsieur le Noir to the farmhouse. I was delighted to find my patient better than I had expected, and, when I took my leave, I had no anxiety about him, and announced to him that in a few days he might get up, and in a week would be about almost as usual. I was pleased at the affectionate manner in which they bid me good-bye.

"I hope our paths will cross, and that we may meet again," I said. But he looked a little queer at that.

"Ah, how is it going to be?" he cried; "it does not do to look forward. You know my philosophy: Be happy while you may."

And so we parted, and I really do not think that the beautiful girl herself had excited more interest in me than her young husband had. There was something taking and attractive about him, the wherefore of which I hardly understood myself.

II.

FOUR years have glided by since the events that I have just narrated. At first, I often thought of Charlie and Floss, but as nothing happened in all that time to recall them to my mind, I may, by the end of them, be said to have forgotten them.

I was travelling in America when I heard that one of my best and oldest friends, Sir Marmaduke Heathcote, had by the death of an elder brother, inherited a family property, and left India to establish himself in England. I was very much attached to Heathcote, though he had the reputation of being a hard man, and he had a way of making people very much afraid of him. He was obstinate certainly, but then, as he was generally in the right, that was not of much consequence.

He had been settled in Dorsetshire for nearly a year, before, soon after my return to London from New York, I received the following letter from my old friend.

"DEAR DASHWOOD,—It will give us great pleasure to see you at Lowlands as soon as you can manage to come. I rejoiced to hear of your return, as I now hope you will be present at my daughter's marriage next month. And I *did* regret the prospect of your not being there. She has been long engaged to Edmond Fairfax, Lord Fairfax's eldest son, and we are all very busy preparing for the happy event. Send me a line to say when we may expect you, and pray arrange to stay over the wedding. Yours affectionately,

"MARMADUKE HEATHCOTE."

A soldier, every inch of him, and a widower. I had never thought of Heathcote as a family man, though I knew he had children in England when I was with him at Madras. He never spoke of them, and I could not even make up my mind whether he had more than this one daughter. It seemed strange to me to think of paying him a visit on the occasion of a child's marriage; yet he had strong affections, and I could fancy his taking great pleasure in family life, though perhaps in so stern and silent a manner that he might not give much in return.

Be that as it might, he had certainly the power of exciting strong affections in friends of his own sex, and I felt very happy when I took my seat in the train for N——, the nearest station to Lowlands—on as fine a summer day as a man need wish to see.

I had only one companion, a young man, opposite to me, of gentlemanly and even fashionable appearance, his face clean-shaved, except for a tiny moustache, his hair cut as short as it could be, unless his head had been shaved like his chin. All as correct as possible. He appeared a little tired and languid, which was quite correct also, and leant back in his corner with closed eyes.

Afterwards, we were both reading our respective newspapers, and I could not keep silence, for I came on a terrible divorce case in high life. I had known both husband and wife—had been at their wedding, and acted the part of best man to the bridegroom. I found he knew the couple afterwards, and we discussed the miserable affair.

We took different views of it, and argued rather hotly. I declared that the marriage could not prove a happy one, and that poor Nichols had no one to thank but himself, for he had known Lady Jane did not care for him, and had only married to please her friends.

"What can a man expect when a girl marries him to please her friends, and not herself?" I concluded: and, strange as it was, I declare I thought my companion blushed.

"I don't go along with you there," he said. "I'm not sure that I am an advocate for much love on the lady's side before marriage." And a curious expression flitted across his face as he spoke.

I expressed my surprise, and remarked that there will be little enough after it, then, in nine cases out of ten.

"I don't admire 'all for love and the world well lost,' the 'where is

he, business. It's well enough on the stage; but in real life—well, I suspect, real life is rather—*nicer*—without it."

"A man," I said, "who marries a woman without her heart is an ass. I did all I could to prevent Nichols's marriage, and see how it has ended."

"A man who can't win a woman's heart after marriage, I grant you is an ass," was his reply. "I'll bet two to one it was there Nichols failed."

"But if she has no heart to be won? what if it is already given away?"

"Oh," he cried, with quite an air of relief, and a little easy laugh—he had been curiously in earnest before—"Oh, I cry you mercy—that is altogether different—I give in to you *there*—if there is another lover the man *is* an ass. The case I was contemplating was quite different—it was simply of a young undemonstrative lady, not eager to rush out of her old home into a new one—not as much in love as her lover." And then he hummed lightly,

"When a lady elopes,
On a ladder of ropes,
She may go to—Hongkong—for me."

"That is an extreme case," I replied; "though, for the romance of the thing, a little romance beforehand is not to be despised."

"I don't like romance," he replied, drily.

We continued arguing, of course neither of us convincing the other, till, as the train slackened its pace at N——, we found that we were both going to get out there, and a few more words exchanged showed that both were going to Lowlands. I expressed my satisfaction at the coincidence.

But again an odd expression passed momentarily across his face—again vanishing as quickly as it came, leaving that face to its natural or acquired expression so completely as to be second nature, impassiveness. I thought he shrank from the idea of finishing the discussion under our own names, and wished it had never been begun.

I introduced myself as Dr. Dashwood; but when he said, with a little smile, that he was Edmond Fairfax, of whom he supposed I had heard, I was completely taken by surprise. As we drove out together, I felt rather queer when I thought of the side he had taken in the argument, on a rather delicate subject, for a man so soon to be married to discuss. And were not his views a little curious for a man in his position to hold? What did it mean? Was Miss Heathcote not in love with him, and was he intending to win her affections after the wedding-day, instead of before? or, was she a fast young lady, and showed her affections a little *too* plainly?"

Those flashes of expression that came across his fashionably impassive countenance must mean something in a man on the brink of matrimony. The future Lady Fairfax was, beyond a doubt, either a

shade too empressée, or a shade not empressée enough, in her manners.

He talked very pleasantly as we drove along, evidently receiving me as Sir Marmaduke's special friend, to be treated with friendly respect by Sir Marmaduke's future son-in-law. He was undoubtedly a very agreeable young fellow. He impressed me most favourably, and I found myself hoping that Miss Heathcote was neither hopelessly slow or fearfully fast.

But here we are at the house, and I can think of nothing but my old friend, who I see standing there, on the steps, looking remarkably well, and wonderfully little changed since I saw him last. A little greyer, perhaps, but that only made his keen dark eyes glance keener and darker than ever, from under their shaggy brows.

We were thoroughly happy to see each other again, and I thought he would have shaken my hand off. The foreign fashion of embracing must sometimes be a comfort to men. He welcomed me warmly, and still grasped my hand in his, while he extended his other to Mr. Fairfax.

He took me straight to his own little study, where we plunged at once into old days' talk. "I have only half-an-hour to give you," he said, looking at his watch, evidently as punctual and methodical as ever, though no longer commander of a division; "then I have two men coming on business, and shan't see you again till dinner time."

And when I was obliged to leave him, we had not found a moment for discussing the present; not a word of the wedding, or his daughters, or Mr. Fairfax: we had only talked of the past. He directed me to the garden, where I should find his daughter; but, though I sought the place, she was not there. But Mr. Fairfax was, rather to my surprise, alone and smoking—a lover who had arrived only half-an-hour!

"Sir Marmaduke thought I should find his daughter here," I said.

"She is not visible yet; I've not seen her myself," he replied, coolly. "A busy time just now, you know—dressmakers and milliners."

I thought I should have preferred a little romance myself, and that he would find it rather fatiguing to have so much to do after marriage. We sauntered about, and talked, and found ourselves on a side terrace, looking into the house.

"That's the library," he said: "I'll show it you."

We stepped through one of the windows into a cool, delicious shade. Sleep rather than Study, I thought, should be the presiding deity here, on a hot summer's day. And, even as I thought it, Mr. Fairfax, though I was not making any noise, raised his hand, and said: "Hush."

Was it an involuntary tribute to the soft repose of the atmosphere? Then I saw that his eyes, full of tender admiration, were steadily fixed on one object—a girl asleep in a chair.

But what a girl it was! What wonderful, melancholy, perfect beauty! Was she dead or alive, with that expression in her face? I

thought she must be dead—newly dead; and yet the expression of the newly dead I knew was very rarely sad.

A curious curtain behind her gave no glow to her white face. I cannot describe her; I only took in a general idea of perfect beauty and profound sadness, for it was the very saddest face my eyes had ever beheld. Her hair, cropped short, and curling on her forehead, after the fashion of the day, which gives such a youthful air to a face, only increased the utter sadness of hers. Her delicate features seemed formed to express nothing but what I should have called despair, only despair implies some amount of passion, and hers was an utter hopelessness—too hopeless to be alive.

I did not breathe freely till we were again on the terrace. "Who is she?" I cried.

"Miss Heathcote," he replied, coolly.

I was so much startled that, without remembering whom I addressed, I said, "Poor girl! *what* is the matter with her?"

"Nothing, that I am aware of," he answered, drily, and looked oddly at me. Recollecting myself, I said, meekly, "I thought she was ill."

"Well, yes, she had a fever about a year ago, and everybody knows the effects of fever remain."

He looked uncomfortable, and I was sorry for him.

"Yes, they do," I said, absently, but the idea flashed across me that she had been out of her mind, and a deep depression still remained on her. This would account both for his manner and her appearance.

"What sort of a fever was it, Mr. Fairfax?" I asked. "I am a doctor, you know, so take an interest in such things."

"It was a nervous fever," he replied, very shortly.

"Ah—just so—a nervous fever. Was she long ill?"

"Yes; she was for weeks in a low state, when no one guessed the cause. She was dangerously ill a long time, and months recovering, and I don't think she has recovered yet."

He spoke with sudden openness, almost as if it was a relief to him.

"She looked melancholy," I hazarded, hesitating for a word. "When she is awake, she has quite a different expression?"

He looked askance at me, almost spoke, but checked himself. I liked the young fellow, and did not wish to vex him, so hastened to add: "I ask as a doctor again—that sort of thing is all health."

"Her spirits *are* depressed," he said, "since the fever; but I am certain our marriage will cure her. She wants change."

He looked anxiously at me, though he spoke with decision, and I cheerfully replied, "Nothing in the world more likely."

He let the subject drop, and so did I.

I felt curious for dinner time to come, as I longed to see again this melancholy bride. It was an odd way to greet the return of an absent lover, by being fast asleep. She had looked like a beautiful picture, or statue, slumbering there, and it now struck me that somewhere or other

I had seen a picture or statue like her, though it had not occurred to me where I saw her.

I learned from Mr. Fairfax that she was an only child, and that there was no one else staying in the house, except a sister of the late Lady Heathcote, an old Scotch lady.

"Lady Heathcote died when they had been married just a year, after the only child was born."

"I have an idea," I said, "that children who cost their mothers' lives always have a sadness about them."

"That won't do," he answered, shaking his head. "Miss Heathcote would not serve for an illustration of the idea. She was not in the least a melancholy child or girl, I assure you."

It was time to dress for dinner, so here we parted. I rather hurried my toilet, as I felt a good deal of curiosity about the melancholy beauty, and thought that by being in the drawing-room some time before dinner, I might secure a tête-à-tête. It did not strike me, from what I had seen or heard, that any stolen interview would be secured or desired by the lovers. I thought the engaged lady would finish her nap, dress for dinner, and then come down to the drawing-room, where all the world would be, and there shake hands with the engaged gentleman, who would take her proceedings as a matter of course, and neither expect nor wish for anything more.

I was downstairs a few minutes after seven, and we were not to dine till half-past, but my little manœuvre was not crowned by success. I had the room to myself for twenty minutes, and then Heathcote came in, apologising for having left me so long alone. "But, business you know, Dashwood, business must be attended to, whether it is civil or military."

"I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing Miss Heathcote."

"No, she won't appear till tea-time. She has one of her headaches, I am sorry to say."

"Have you noticed that she always has one of her headaches when Mr. Fairfax is expected?" said a voice with a strong Scotch accent behind me.

I quite started, as much at what seemed to me the ill-nature lying in the words, as at the unexpectedness of hearing them at all.

"Allow me to introduce Dr. Dashwood to you, Belinda," said Sir George. "Dashwood—Miss Mackenzie!"

I bowed, and she curtsied. A tall, thin, unmarried female, a little Scotch, perhaps, in the high cheek-bones and rather sandy colouring, but with traces of what must once have been uncommon beauty, still about her.

The gong sounded, and Mr. Fairfax appeared.

"He never comes before it," Miss Mackenzie remarked; "not a minute. How d'ye do, Edmond?"

He barely touched her hand, looking round the room, with the nearest approach to eagerness I had seen about him, as he did so.

"My daughter has a headache, I am sorry to say," Sir George said, in his formal way.

"You expected it, I daresay—it's the usual thing," Miss Mackenzie remarked, as she took her host's arm for the dining-room.

The dinner was not lively, though conversation never actually flagged. Heathcote and I had plenty to say to each other, but should have said it more easily without the listeners less interested than ourselves. Miss Mackenzie's remarks appeared to me always to have a little venom in them, and Mr. Fairfax was rather languid and distrait. This I thought only natural. I pitied the young man, and was beginning to regard him with very friendly feelings.

At last dinner was over, and we adjourned to the drawing-room, but still the heroine of the story did not appear. Nor did she till the servant had brought in the tea apparatus, when, as he left the apartment, she glided into it.

She was dressed in black, which made her paleness more apparent, and had no colour about her, only a white stephanotis in the front of her dress. Some transparent material covered, without hiding, her neck and arms. She was tall, and I could see, as she glided noiselessly forward, that her figure was as faultless as her face. She kept her eyes cast down, but appeared to feel who was in the room, though she did not see them; for she advanced towards her father and myself, who stood chatting in the bay window, where the tea things had been placed, and, as she did so, extended her hand to Mr. Fairfax en passant. He just took it and, I think, pressed, for he did not shake, it, and then let it drop. He looked earnestly at her. "Better," he almost whispered, and she almost whispered "Yes," in reply. And all the time she never raised her eyes for one moment, and her face never varied from the expression of profound melancholy it had worn in her sleep. All the time her likeness, and yet unlikeness, to some person or picture that I had seen was borne in upon my mind, while a disagreeable sort of spell-bound sensation, as if I were beholding a ghost, took possession of my mind, so ghost-like was her appearance, her gliding movements, her silent approach, during which she never for one moment raised her eyes.

She was close to us, and Sir George introduced us in his formal way.

"Mr. Dashwood, let me present you to my daughter."

I bowed; she curtsied, and held out her hand to her father's old friend. I took it, and it was as cold as ice; then she raised her eyes and looked at me.

Good heavens! how her eyes astonished me—light, melancholy blue I had expected; but these were of the deepest brown, and as brilliant as stars! Where—where—heavens and earth!—*where* had I seen them—had I seen *her*—before?

I almost leaped backwards, as a revelation flashed across me, and I half whispered the word "Floss!"

(To be concluded.)

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

By CHARLES W. WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "IN THE BLACK FOREST," ETC.

WE returned from Tangiers just in time to hear that they were illuminating the caves with blue lights ; and on the chance of being not too late, Broadley and I started up the Rock in the rear of those who had gone before. Alas ! ere we could reach the caves the last light was extinguished, and profound darkness reigned once more. A few blue-jackets, who had assisted at the ceremony with candles, were still there, but with the best will in the world they only made darkness yet more visible. The caves looked huge, mysterious, and impenetrable : and now you unexpectedly stumbled down half a dozen unseen steps, and now nearly fell into unprotected abysses on the right hand and on the left. Great columns of rock and high vaulted roofs gave one the impression of being in some ancient heathen temple that might have belonged to an extinct race of giants, and no doubt under the blue lights the effect was startling and splendid. We regretted our untoward fate ; but to be ten minutes too late has before now turned the current of a life, and changed the fortunes of an empire.

After the intense outside heat, too, the caves were freezingly cold, and in a few minutes we were shivering as if ague stricken. So after sundry falls and half a dozen break-neck escapes, we were glad to get back to daylight.

Not much longer would the Reserve Squadron grace the waters of Gibraltar Bay. The view from this point, half way up the rock, was, and ever must be, one of singular beauty and interest. The hill sloped gradually to the town, and nearly all it possessed of verdure and vegetation immediately surrounded us. The town, reaching to the calm bay, seemed hot and crowded. To the left, Europa Point looked towards the African coast. We fancied ourselves just able to discern its outlines, and mark the spot where stood Tangiers, late scene of our exploits and anxieties. Broadley, indeed, had recovered marvelously, and was himself again. But merely to gaze across the straits and imagine the outlines and undulations of Tangiers brought back all yesterday's experiences.

"What a shame," said Broadley, looking out over the water in a dreamy sort of way, "that you should have been so bothered, and half our short visit wasted, by the indiscretion of lemon tea ! Who knows when we may find ourselves there again ? Don't you think we ought to warn everybody against that tea ?"

"Hardly necessary," I returned. "The decoction seemed to me

particularly nauseous. I wondered how in the world you got through so much of it. But we left one trouble behind us only to come back to another."

"What's that?" said Broadley. "You mean that after all we are not to see the waters of Vigo?"

"No," I replied. "That is disappointing, of course, but I referred more particularly to Van Stoker. If he continues to write letters and love sonnets at this rate, his brain must give way. Did you observe

the cargo he sent on shore in the steam pinnace just before we landed? The pinnace was nearly swamped. He will surely have to raise a mortgage on his Irish estates to cover the expenses of postage. And do you see that the *Defence* has nearly righted herself?—that list to starboard has all but disappeared."

"Wonderful!" cried Broadley, unable to restrain a laugh, notwithstanding the solemnity of the subject. "He was sitting on the locker when we got back from Tangiers, gazing into vacancy, and looked wan and pale. I tried to rouse him into better spirits, but it wouldn't do; he sighed profoundly, and seemed to measure the depth of



MOORISH BEGGARS, TANGIERS.

the water. The poor fellow's terribly unstrung, but the homeward voyage will do wonders for him."

"Then there's Pyramid," I continued, "who's getting almost as bad. I went down into his cabin for a few minutes' chat, and there he was, Sanskrit in one hand, pressed lily in the other, dividing his attention between the two. 'Congratulate me!' said he. 'The Admiral has given orders that instead of proceeding to Vigo we are to return to Arosa Bay. He must have heard about the lily and done this for my sake. When I think that in a few days I shall once more see *her*, have an opportunity of rescuing *her* from those barbarian gaolers, I feel

transported to Elysium realms. Tell me,' he added (calling me by my nickname on board: we all had our distinguishing titles, which more or less fitted into some individual trait or distinctive characteristic), 'do you think it would be possible to smuggle her into the *Defence*?' "

"Sheer madness!" cried Broadley to me, in consternation. "Surely you didn't hold out any encouragement?"

"I'm afraid I did," I answered, guiltily. "For the life of me I can't help sympathising with him. 'Would you give up your cabin to her?' he asked, 'and I'll give mine up to you, and get Dr. O'Thwartigan to certify that I am suffering from accelerated action of the heart, and must have an uninterrupted current of fresh air. I can have a temporary shakedown under the wind-sail in the ward-room, or take up my quarters among the charts.'"

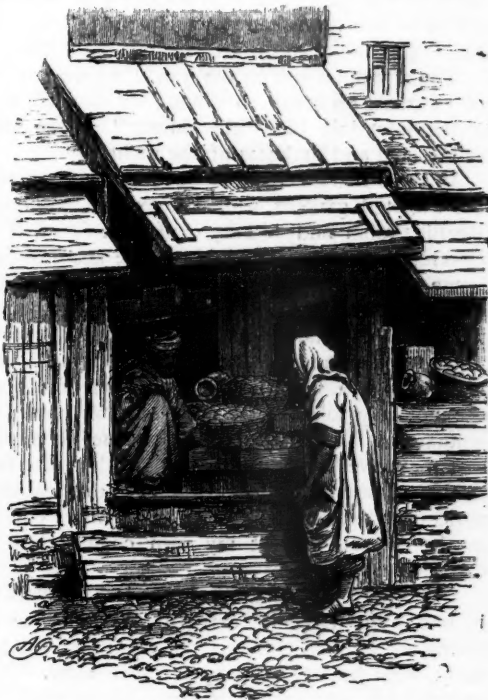
"And what did you say?" cried Broadley, looking like Jove ready to launch forth thunderbolts.

"Said I'd help him all I could,"

I answered. "But as that amounts to a mere nothing, I felt I was not committing any great indiscretion. I left him contemplating the lily; no doubt he is gazing at it now. But what a disappointment to *us*," I continued, "who have no fair captive to rescue, to miss the waters of Vigo, lose Seville, with its rich orange groves, its beautiful women, famous in song and story, its ancient buildings. We might almost have had a second edition of the Alhambra—if, indeed, that were possible."

"And what about the bull-fight?" demanded Broadley.

"A case of playing Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out.



STALL IN TANGIERS.—DRIVING A BARGAIN.

To us it will be no loss, since we had made up our minds never to see another. If one love in a life is enough, so is one bull-fight."

All this time we were gazing on the broad waters of the Straits. Across the bay the little town of Algeciras reposed under the shadow of the hills. On all sides mountains rose in grand, broad outlines, sleeping and hazy in the hot sunshine. On the waters below us, the fleet looked noble and stately. We could almost fancy we saw Van Stoker gazing into vacancy, hear Pyramid sighing from intense bliss. Darrille was lying down with an attack of neuralgia, a more constant friend to him even than it was to me. Darcy had landed, and was ransacking the town for art treasures and curious photographs.

The afternoon was on the wane; we were hot and tired. Instead of returning on board to dinner, we decided to take it quietly, dine at the hotel, join the "idle throng" on the Alameda, and get back in the cool and darkness of the night.

In the broiling sun we made our way down to the pleasant but as yet deserted gardens, whiled away half an hour in the well-supplied Reading-room and Library, and then found it was time to saunter towards the hotel. The table d'hôte was crowded, the heat tropical. Some of the male guests had started fans, which they used gracefully as ladies. It looked slightly ridiculous, but was probably an aid to digestion. The dinner was well-dressed, the wines were well-iced; but when it came to dessert, I remembered a scene in the hall not many days ago, when the old Jew brought out a lovely basket from the unlovely folds of his abba—and I passed the fruit. "Where ignorance is bliss 'twere folly to be wise" is more true than many sayings that have become proverbs. And, seeing others going in extensively for luscious figs black with ripeness, and sweet water grapes, and apricots and greengages, that here are more countless than the stones in the streets, I kept my own counsel and regretted my own experience.

When the sun had gone down, and the stars began to appear one by one in the darkening skies, the Alameda was crowded with people taking the air, and enjoying the strains of the band that, in the still night, went floating far away over the water. Spanish women, some graceful and captivating in mantillas, others following the fashion of their English sisters, very much less so in hats and bonnets, coquetted to and fro and threw out killing glances from their deep-fringed lids, and looked out upon the water where the vessels of the fleet had gradually become misty and intangible, like so many Flying Dutchmen, and now could be discerned only by the lights flashing from port and starboard. English and Spanish mingled and fraternised. Yet how different were the dark, southern beauties from our own fair countrywomen. The one all fire and passion, swayed by their emotions, ready to risk all for love and intrigue; the other, inwardly pure as outwardly they are fair and lovely and of good report.

It was our last night in Gibraltar, but we knew it not. As we went

down to the Ragged Staff, and put off for the *Defence*, we flattered ourselves we should have one more evening on shore. It was not to be. Instead of sailing on the Friday morning, according to our original programme, we were to weigh anchor at five o'clock on Thursday afternoon and begin the turning-point in the cruise—our homeward journey.

Thus on Thursday morning, after lunch, we went into Gibraltar for the last time. Only a few of us cared to do so. Like the end of all things: the last pages of a novel, the conclusion of a long day's journey, even the accomplishment of a hard task: enthusiasm with many began to flag, and the mild excitements of novelty and change that on first reaching the old Rock had been sufficient to raise a human interest, now grew flat, stale, and unprofitable. And yet it is not necessary to read sermons in stones to make them attractive. All phases of life have their daily record of light and shade. Those who live in view of an exquisite landscape never weary of it because it has its changes for every hour of the day, almost for every day of the year. So he who observes character ever so slightly, will in the humblest life and most ordinary occupation find some new fact or freak of fancy worthy a passing thought. Under such conditions all days and all phases and all lives have their charm.

We landed and made the most of our last afternoon. I had undertaken a commission that I thought would be difficult and which proved impossible. Pyramid wanted some more Vigo plates to add to his already abundant store, and the greater part of the afternoon was spent in fruitless endeavours to collect a few scattered specimens. The shops had been too well ransacked already; an army of human locusts had passed over them, and not a fragment had escaped.

Gibraltar is very different from Tangiers, and bazaars innumerable tempt the speculative and the daring. I do not think one was left unvisited, and we spent a small fortune in cab hire. Useless labour and cost. The bazaar owners will long remember the visit of the First Reserve Squadron, and probably prayed that this year might bring it again to its shores.

But for this year a far different and less interesting cruise was mapped out. Heligoland and Bergen, the quiet waters of Shetland, and the dull regions of Orkney formed the greater part of a monotonous and uneventful programme. And Orkney and Shetland are essentially spots not to be visited unless you have friends in the islands who will acquaint you with their bearings, and bring to light the hidden secrets and beauties of the waters.

The rocks of Shetland, indeed, might well tempt one to a long sojourn amidst them, and day by day they will only be more passionately loved. But many a wanderer to the islands returns without any idea that he has been in the neighbourhood of a rocky coast, wilder and more beautiful than anything we possess in England; where myriads of birds make their home, rise at your approach,

and darken the air with their numbers, and scream and cry with that wild clang that to many an ear is sweeter than the sweetest music.

I never hear the passing cry of a sea-gull but at once there rises up a vivid picture of days and weeks spent in those distant waters; cruises in and out of rocks and caves; nooks so gigantic, so hollow, so reverberating, that the cry of a single bird would startle you with its power and its echoes. Days when the sea was tossing and the winds blew, and our little yacht was the only craft bold enough to venture out upon the waters. Scenes indescribably wild and grand, when the waves dashed against the rocks and the spray fell back with passionate force, or the advancing swell rolled into the hollows and broke with a sound of thunder; and the wind would tear round and round the rocks, and over the water, and sweep down from the land with treacherous force; and we with difficulty, and a temerity that never came to grief and defied warnings, would steer our little boat into some small natural harbour formed by the rocks and the ages.

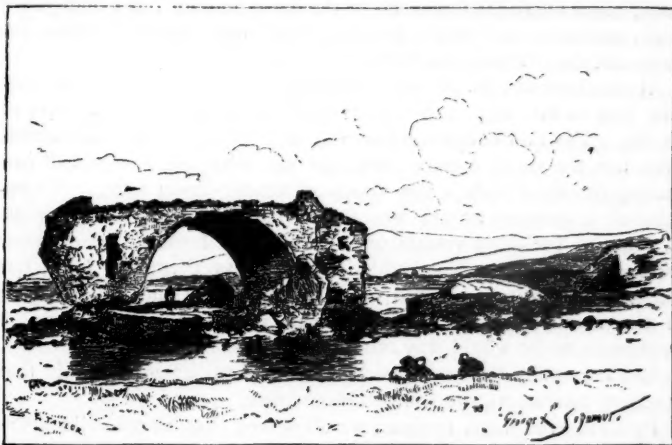
There we would land and rest, and revel in the fury of the elements and the sense of wild freedom that is the most delicious experience on earth. And the birds in countless numbers would rise and wheel around, and cry and scream, and watch us curiously as we lighted our lamp and boiled our coffee, and brought out our sandwich boxes. The smell of the salt sea, and the fresh blowing wind, the blue skies, and the bright, hot sunshine, all remain in the memory, tinged with that melancholy that all pleasures past and gone for ever carry with them.

Many a time on these wild days, when the less venturesome folk of Lerwick prophesied the return of an empty and inverted boat, we have rounded the rocks by the "Giant's leg," and turned the corner which brings the still distant harbour into view. Perhaps we have been two hours beyond our time—dinner was ordered for seven, it is now nine: but who can measure the uncertainty of wind and waves?—and in the gathering twilight, on the point beyond the Widows' Asylum, stands the figure of a woman, with her hand shading her eyes and her garments fluttering in the wild wind. And we have recognised our good and anxious landlady, Mrs. Sinclair of Leog, who, perhaps for the twentieth time, has wended her way to the point, to gaze seawards in the hope of discovering signs of the tardy wanderers. No one without experience can even faintly imagine the unspeakable pleasure of such days and scenes. Nature is here in her grandest aspect, her wildest moods, her most solemn influences. In a word, we have reached the height of all healthy and possible emotion.

But we have wandered far from Gibraltar and the Reserve Squadron, and if we do not hasten back we shall be left behind. For on that Thursday afternoon we were to depart, and bid farewell to the town, the Rock, the monkeys that we had never seen, the submarine and mysterious passage leading across to Africa that we had no wish to

see. So, our afternoon wasted in fruitless search after Vigo plates and Lisbon pottery, we returned to the *Defence*.

On the very point of departure, a signal was made for the assembling on board the Flag Ship of the Captains of the Fleet. The result was awaited with some wonder and speculation. Only too soon we learnt that the cruise of the Reserve Squadron for 1882 was virtually over. Orders had arrived from England for our immediate return. Affairs in the East looked unsettled and alarming; England was left without ships of war; we were to proceed at once to her shores. Vigo had already been abandoned, and we should not again see Arosa Bay. All this was matter for regret. I had had a longing once more to enter the wild and lovely wilderness where that "rosebud garden of girls" had showered hospitality upon us; had longed once more to



OLD ROMAN ARCH, TANGIERS.

revel in those rich geranium blooms, those shady avenues, the exquisite view of the blue waters of the bay, and the undulating hills surrounding the harbour. There would be no fresh lily for Pyramid, no rescue for the Fair Maid, who must now ceaselessly rattle her captive chains in transports of agony and despair. Nothing but the direct voyage home awaited us: the coast line of Spain and Portugal, the capricious waters of the Bay of Biscay, the English Channel—and *Finis*.

Instinctively I looked for Pyramid. He had disappeared. Had gone down to the M. B., borrowed "*Hervey's Meditations among the Tombs*," and a volume of "*Tracts on the Misdirection of the Affections*," with which he retired to the solitude of his cabin. But an opposite effect was produced in Van Stoker. His spirits began to rise from the first, his complexion returned, all signs of approaching decline dissolved and disappeared. Instead of writing love sonnets, he took to playing the flute, and whilst congratulating him on his

improved appearance, we condoled with one another on his diversified occupation. All day long he rang the changes of, "In my Cottage near a Wood," and "Orinthia; or, the Pilgrim of Love," until we felt that the Dead March in Saul, or the chromatic scale, would have been a welcome and enlivening variation.

Soon after five o'clock, then, on the Thursday afternoon, the ships weighed anchor, and in solemn state steamed away from Gibraltar. Leaving the quiet waters of the bay, they passed out into the broader channel of the straits. The rock, the town, Algeciras on one hand, and the coast of Africa on the other, all would soon be to us a scene of the past. They took up their positions in two lines of four and three, and began the return journey. For many days we should not touch land. All change and adventure was over. Sail drill and manœuvres would alone break the monotony of the days; and for our evenings we might return to our books, Sanskrit, whist, our improving conversations, and our "Small and Early" parties.

At the latter the M. B. as a rule took the chair, for they were generally held in his cabin, and serious topics were the special delight of his life. Tea and coffee were occasionally handed round as restoratives, but the most popular beverage was what the French call eau sucrée, flavoured with a few drops of orange-flower water. Everything of a stronger nature was strictly banished from the meetings. In some of the other vessels of the Fleet, the favourite refreshment patronised was a horrible distillation known as Plymouth Gin; but the small quantity on board the *Defence* was in the safe keeping of the worthy Dr. O'Thwartigan, who served it out in cases of emergency as he would any other of his nauseous pills and drugs. Before the end of the cruise we had most of us decided to join that excellent institution, the Blue Ribbon Army.

Pyramid even went further; we all agreed that his splendid figure gave him the opportunity of doing good that he was at present culpably wasting. It would go far towards winning converts for the Salvation Army, especially in securing recruits for the "Hallelujah Maidens." He promised to take the matter into consideration. Thus we might be said to have amongst us on board all the elements of a Revival. But it is grievous to add that Pyramid, our strongest hope and most influential member, from a personal point of view, completely fell away from his enviable state of mind before the end of the cruise. We had a foe in the camp; a Canaanite in the land; for at the very last "Small and Early" on board, he made us vibrate with horror, by declaring that the Salvation Army was all humbug, and before joining the Blue Ribbons he would see them at Halifax.

Quietly and uneventfully the days passed after leaving Gibraltar. But the Bay of Biscay, calm and civil to us when outward bound, determined, in returning, to prove her powers of caprice. One day, especially, the sea from early morning transformed itself into great moving hills and valleys of water. The ships tossed and tumbled

about in a manner alarming to weak nerves. It was impossible to walk the decks, or to keep even the semblance of a well-balanced mind and body. Now the other vessels disappeared as we sank into a watery vale that threatened to engulf us; and now we rose to the occasion on the top of a mountain, whence we could see our companions tossing about like floats, powerless as pigmies in the hands of a giant, yet holding on their way, guided and kept in check by their small helm.

It was a grand sight and a grand day; the only day during the whole cruise on which we saw a really heavy sea. And even on this occasion, the liquid hills and valleys went rolling along majestically, rising and falling, increasing and diminishing, but never breaking. Never breaking except when a roller hit the good old *Defence* a sharp broadside, that made her shiver as she ploughed through the angry trough. Then a shower of spray would break over her, and drench all those who stood in the way of this copious shower bath, and swamp the decks from which the water poured away through the scuppers, back whence they had come.

So it went on, hour after hour. The skies were dark and lowering; throughout the afternoon we had a semi-darkness, the water looked now a dismal green, and now a cold, inky black. One shuddered at the very thought of the thousands who had gone down into its cruel depths. The wind roared and whistled through the rigging; the timbers strained and cracked in vain protest against the fury of the elements. Worst of all, the temperature was cold, damp and shivery. From the moment of leaving Arosa Bay, outward bound, we had revelled in a tropical climate. If the weather had been intensely hot, the lightness of the air had made it not only bearable, but delicious. Letter after letter from England recorded a cold summer and wet days and grey skies, with no warmth or beauty in them. And we had made the most of our happier lot whilst sympathising with a state of things that in England seemed to have become chronic, since year after year brought much the same experience.

To-day, in the Bay of Biscay, we had returned to a northern, unwelcome climate. How we regretted the warm days of Arosa Bay and Gibraltar, Granada, and Tangiers, and longed to return to that climate that now by comparison seemed a very paradise, cannot be told. To attempt to sit down to meals might be described as Love's Labour Lost. Now a watery vale sent us all rolling one way into each others' arms, a confusion of tongues, chairs, unseated members, groans and laughter; and now, rising to the summit of a billowy Mont Blanc, everything and everyone went sprawling in an opposite direction.

At tiffin it was bad enough, but at dinner it was worse, and after sundry attempts one or two of us gave up the experiment and retired to the sofas. Notably Pyramid, who having received the contents of a plate of scalding soup over him, excused himself with wh

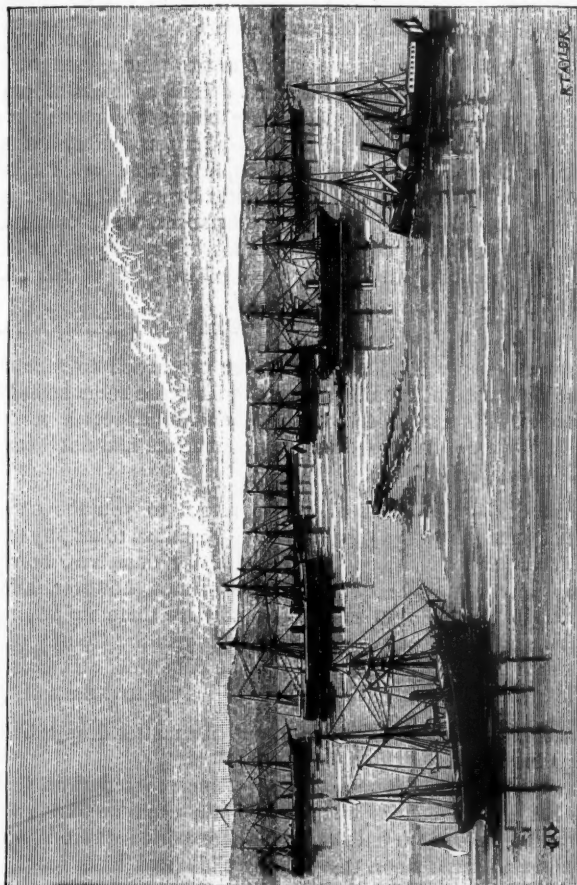
sounded very like an inverted benediction, and took up a recumbent position. I quickly followed so good an example, and from our grateful couches we watched the manœuvres of those still at table, the miracles hungry human nature can accomplish, the difficulties determination will overcome.

There was no whist that evening, no improving conversation, no "Small and Early." Even Darcy, in vain attempt to take his usual interest in his art treasures and black paper silhouettes—as improving to the mind in their peculiar way as the M. B.'s little lectures—put them up and went to bed. The M. B. himself was dull and dispirited, and appealed to his senior on board, the worthy Dr. O'Thwartigan, as to whether, under the circumstances, his usual evening dose of eau sucrée might be flavoured with a few drops of Plymouth gin in place of the usual orange-flower water. But the worthy doctor, not seeing sufficient reason for a breach of the ordinary rules (he was as anxious as we were for the M. B.'s welfare and happiness, and they were excessively attached to each other), negated the suggestion. Whereupon the amiable M. B. retired in wretched spirits to his cabin and spent the remainder of the evening among the tombs with his favourite Hervey. (Pyramid had returned him the book by this time, much consoled by its cheerful and comfortable pages, and inspired with an exhilarating conviction of the mutability of all earthly things.)

Greatest miracle of all, Wakeham this evening was silent. De Keyser had taken a dose of anti-fat, and abandoned his evening walk on deck of four miles, measured by a pedometer, and had retired to his own cabin in company with Pyramid, for a game of "Beggar my Neighbour." They were both partial to this very innocent distraction; never played for money if they could help it; and "Beggar my Neighbour" was just sufficiently exciting to make the time pass pleasantly. I once thoughtlessly proposed a game at loo, and shall never forget the combined horror of the countenances around me. A proposal to blow up the Fleet would hardly have created as much sensation. Not only was it against the rules of the Service, but it was a device of the Evil One for the ruin of soul and body. They first thought of reporting my suggestion to the Captain, but finally contented themselves with composing a special prayer for me against the World, the Flesh and the Devil, to be publicly used in next Sunday's service. I am glad to say that I was soon brought to a better frame of mind, and restored to their full favour and confidence.

Time passed; we entered the waters of the English Channel, and felt very near home. Having started from Portland, so in like manner we were to return to it. Again that subtle change crept over everyone that marks the end of all things. During the cruise our interests had all been in common; now each looked at life from a separate point of view. There would shortly be a sort of general break up

in the camp. Broadley was leaving on promotion. Wakeham had applied to be sent out to Egypt, and received an affirmative answer. Van Stoker, who had joined merely for the Cruise, was naturally burning to be away. He had packed up his flute and turned generally restless and unsettled. He felt like Othello, his occupation gone.



THE RESERVE SQUADRON AT GIBRALTAR.

It was useless to write love letters, since he would himself precede them. The expense of postage, moreover, had been ruinous, and he confided to me that in the unsatisfactory state of Ireland, he doubted whether a mortgage upon his estates would realise sufficient to cover his postal liabilities. Under the present management, every possible facility had been given for a general division of Irish property to everyone who could prove that he had no possible claim thereon. This

being the state of affairs, who in their senses would accept a mortgage? We all declined it on the spot, even under the most favourable conditions. Wayle alone—another supernumerary lieutenant, who, during the cruise, had developed a general talent for argumentativeness—said he would have taken the mortgage if he could, but he couldn't. So, on reaching Portland, Van Stoker wrote to his solicitors, and received in due course the following answer:

"DEAR SIR,—We have done our utmost to raise a mortgage upon your Irish Estates, but without success. Half a dozen of our best and most venturesome clients quite refuse to accept them even at a gift. Others remark that, in course of time, Irish property will be cut up into portions, and divided amongst the people as a reward for general good conduct, love of peace, and a singular regard for the laws of meum and tuum. Under these circumstances, we recommend you to endeavour to *sell* the property. We might possibly obtain a price which would enable you to cover the legal expenses of our claim in this transaction.

Yours truly,

"HOWARD AND DEVONSHIRE."

This would never do. So Van Stoker proceeded to memorialise the Home Office for a remittance of the immense sums he had spent in postage. Everyone said he must be mad to expect a favourable reply. But the result proved that his confidence had not been misplaced. It ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—We shall be happy to return to you the enormous amounts spent in franking your letters. (Permit us to ask, by the way, not from vulgar curiosity, but as a guide for ourselves, how many hundred secretaries you employ.) We cannot, however, afford to send you so large a sum in specie, and have therefore arranged to hand you over 10,000 acres of Irish property in the County of Donoughmore. A mutual benefit will thus be conferred, and we remain, dear Sir, yours gratefully,

"WHITEHALL & Co."

Van Stoker took time to consider, and the matter dropped.

To go back.

In state and dignity the Reserve Squadron proceeded up Channel. With what mixed feelings we passed again each well-known point and object. How much had we seen and experienced since, outward bound, we had gazed upon those ruddy cliffs and bold rocks, those verdant slopes and undulating hills. The very sunshine had seemed gilded with the pleasures of imagination. Now our ardour was damped by the ending of a cruise that had been singularly pleasant, the dispersion of companions distinguished by a harmony of tastes and pastimes, profitable studies, and a love for discussions on profound and serious topics. The give-and-take principle of life, secret of all good fellowship, had never been absent. Very soon, how widely dispersed would our various lines become.

Dr. O'Thwartigan longed for that repose which domestic felicity could alone impart. His junior, the amiable M. B., panted for the hour when he should rejoin his debating society, and give forth to the world the pamphlet that should revolutionise modern thought, and bring lasting confusion to all followers of Darwin. Wakeham was wild with excitement at the prospect of going out to Egypt, where undoubtedly he would distinguish himself, and add to his already numerous decorations. It is unnecessary to describe Van Stoker's emotions, or his immediate destination. So we all had our various lines to traverse, except those who, like Darrille and Darcy, Pyramid and the Commander, must still, for many a long month to come, stand by the good old *Defence*.

So passed the final hours. One morning, in the grey, cold dawn, I was awakened out of a sound sleep by a message to the effect that "Captain Broadley, sir, would be glad if you could join him on the bridge."

Up I went, in the chilling atmosphere. It was neither night nor day, though light was momentarily increasing. In solemn silence, the vessels of the Reserve Squadron were passing within the breakwater of Portland. Before us was the well-known little island, singularly enough bearing in outline some faint, diminutive resemblance to Gibraltar. We had left the rock in the warmth and glow and brightness of sunshine—how grateful by comparison. Portland looked gloomy and cheerless, cold and inhospitable; reflecting, as it were, the sorrows of its destiny. Weymouth, to the right, still slept. It would wake up to find once more the vessels of the fleet exactly where they were some weeks ago, and to wonder whether the interval had been a dream, the vacant waters imagination. One by one the vessels passed round the breakwater, and took up their positions. Then, at a given signal from the Flag Ship, down went the anchors with a simultaneous splash and rattle. The cruise was over.

Yet not quite over. We had returned to England, it is true, but our time was not up, and it was soon found that the vessels were not yet to disperse. As usual, contradictory rumours were afloat. Now it was said that we were merely to cruise about the channel; and now that we were to go over to Cherbourg to pay our French neighbours a visit. Time would show; and time very quickly showed that we were not again to leave English waters, or to lose sight of the English coast.

The succeeding days were not the least delightful of the whole cruise. The hours passed in that delicious idleness that is the height of luxury to those whose ordinary life is one of hard work. In the morning, sometimes we would go a-fishing, and invariably return with empty baskets. It was evident that there were no fish in the sea; or they had all been caught; or they had gone cruising to other shores. In the afternoon we would land and stroll about Portland, or the quiet, very uneventful streets of Weymouth, and lounge away an hour

at the club, and always get back in time for dinner—that most important event of daily life. Here, too, off Portland, we had the long deferred regatta. The day was perfect and the afternoon passed in the excitement of competition. The men of the *Defence* carried off the First Prize, and one or two of the funnier races provoked roars of laughter.

One afternoon we went from Weymouth to see the famous Swanery at Lord Ilchester's. Nowhere else in England exists the singular sight of many hundred birds flying across the water at the whistle of the keeper, flapping their wings and clamouring to be fed. It is one of the prettiest drives out of Weymouth; the village is interesting, and the inn was everything that was pleasant and comfortable. A neat-handed Phyllis, with more than her share of good looks, waited on us: whilst a modest bride and bridegroom, who had not expected an invasion, went and hid their blushes and their happiness in the lanes, wandering about the earth that for them was just now evidently a paradise. From an old piano in the corner, we did our best to draw forth strains of triumph in honour of the happy pair, but they would not be charmed into return. No melody or harmony could equal that existing in their own hearts. We passed out of their existence and presently returned to the *Defence*.

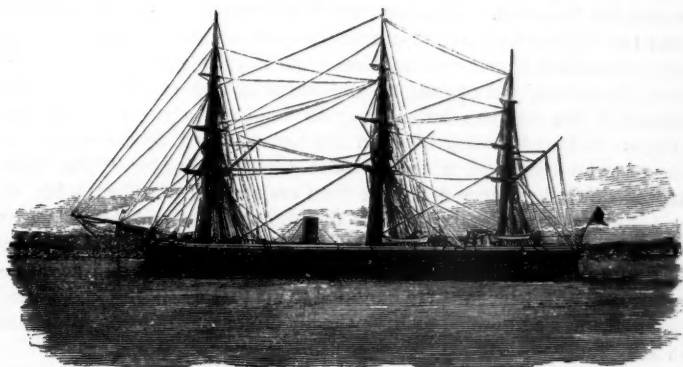
We steamed down channel and put into Torbay one Saturday night. The unexpected advent of seven ships of war surprised the good people; perhaps alarmed them, until they found out that our intentions were friendly, and our motives honourable. Never during the whole cruise had the vessels looked to greater advantage than when at anchor in these waters, framed as they were in an exquisite setting of fertile, undulating hills. There are few lovelier spots in England. We landed on Sunday morning, but the sea was so rough, the wind so boisterous, that we had hard work to reach the steps. There we battled with wind and water and stone, which did their best to swamp us, but failed. A few hours on shore passed only too quickly, in finding out old friends and wandering about the beautiful "irregularities" of Torquay; and then we found that getting back to the fleet was a yet harder task than we had had in the morning. At five o'clock in the evening we started again for Portland.

The fleet left Portland for Portsmouth. Here we went round the Isle of Wight, one of the prettiest and pleasantest sights of the whole cruise. The green spots of the island, the graceful undulations, so beautifully wooded, the well-placed houses, form, as it were, a succession of park-like scenes. We felt very much as if gazing upon enchanted ground. Opposite Osborne, where Her Majesty was then in residence, we fired a Royal salute. The ships anchored off Portsmouth, and, soon after, the Admiral finally resigned Command of the Squadron. Passing between the lines, His Royal Highness made for Osborne.

The Cruise of the Reserve Squadron was now virtually over. It remained only for each vessel to return to its station. Here Van

Stoker left us, and the wardroom went into mourning. Wayle also departed. Broadley, alas, had left us days and days ago, within a few hours of first reaching Portland; and the old *Defence* looked so strange without him, and the wardroom so empty, that I would fain have departed also. But Captain Jago (now Admiral Jago, for he has since obtained Flag Rank,) declared he would treat me as a deserter if I left the ship; and it required neither humorous threat nor great persuasion to induce me to accept the invitation, and take up my quarters with the kindest and most hospitable of men; who, out of the abundance of an overflowing heart, made the weeks that followed, weeks never to be forgotten; charged with a grateful recollection neither time nor change could efface.

Our numbers were diminishing. The *Defence* proceeded on to Plymouth, where Wakeham left for Egypt, *via* London. We were



H.M.S. *Defence*.

fortunate enough to come in for the Plymouth regatta, and one of the prettiest sights imaginable was to see the graceful yachts with their white sails, flying out seawards from one end of the breakwater, and coming in at the other. Here, alas, another of our diminishing numbers departed: one who had contributed much to the life and soul of the cruise; had been full of fun and wit; always ready for anything that was going on, often the first to propose some active scheme of enjoyment. Mr. Edward Jago left us, amidst lamentations and mourning and woe.

It now remained for us to make our way round to Rock Ferry. The weather was simply celestial. The lovely Devonshire coast never looked more tempting. I know not whether day or night was the more exquisite enjoyment. Not a breath of wind ruffled the surface of the water. All through, it was a sea of glass; a painted ocean. We rounded the Land's End and passed the grand rocks of Tintagel and Boscastle, and all that lovely and romantic coast. By day we had

broad sunshine and blue skies, and by night, the time of full moon had once more come round.

It was impossible not to draw a comparison between this hour, pleasant as it was, and that other hour when the moon, in full orb'd brightness, had lighted up that magic scene in Granada—the halls and courts of the Alhambra. How vividly it came back to us. How, not only the whole marvellous panorama, but every minute detail, seemed stamped for ever upon the memory. How we longed to put back the dial of our lives and find ourselves once more in the midst of those days and experiences that could never return; even though fate or fortune might very possibly at some future time lead us over the same ground. The first press of the grape is the sweetest. Things never do repeat themselves; there is always a difference; and imagination magnifies that difference into a mighty change.

Onward up St. George's Channel. Every hour was bringing us nearer the final end. The last morning dawned, and outside Liverpool the *Defence* halted to discharge her quarter's ammunition. It was a second edition of our work outside Arosa Bay. Pyramid alone shrank from the ordeal. It opened up old wounds, and called to remembrance a fair captive, languishing in hopeless expectation of his return. I found the lily between his Sanskrit, and on the margin of the page he had written the pathetic verses beginning "The heart bowed down." Darcy had more than once asked him for the lily, to add to his matchless collection of photographs and black paper silhouettes, gathered from all parts of the world, and combining many of the beauties of nature and of art. But Pyramid could never be brought to part with it. He confided to me that when they had settled down again, he intended to have the lily cremated, and wear the ashes in a locket.

Round after round of ammunition went thundering out to sea. We all grew black and smoke dried, and thought what a blessing it was this firing occurred only four times a year. Then the torpedo had to be launched, and we had lost our gunnery lieutenant, and his successor had not yet joined, and what was to be done? Darrille came to the rescue. He had read up for the occasion, and the torpedo went off with signal success. The target disappeared into the depths of the sea or the heights of the clouds: and the firing was over.

Up the Mersey: the banks on each side narrowing and showing more and more life and activity as we neared that great centre of wealth and industry. Reaching Liverpool we found ourselves in a forest of masts, a world of energy and enterprise, a hive of human bees; everything that was great and prosperous, but prosy and commonplace. So great a contrast to our late life was too violent and unromantic to bear contemplation. What consolation is there in telling us that we cannot have our cake and eat it too? Very few of us are philosophers, and none of us are always philosophic. Yet must we make up our minds to adopt the motto of the Eastern King:

"This also shall pass away." To-day we visit the tombs of our friends, and to-morrow other friends visit ours. So when, at 1.40, on that Monday afternoon, the *Defence* reached her moorings at Rock Ferry, and the anchors went down with a last run and rattle, the sound fell upon the ear with something of the knell of departed hope.

Yet there had not yet been one drawback to record, one regret to register. Our days had been gilded with sunshine. Perhaps we should only realise the delight and pleasure of the cruise, when the flight of time proved how much memory had laid up in store for the future. A recollection of scenes, events, adventures, infinitely pleasant companionship, that in the passing away left behind them no sorrow and no sadness save the inevitable penalty of retrospection.



BY EDEN'S SWIFT TIDE.

ALL silent and changed is the spot where we parted,
In days that have vanished, by Eden's swift tide;
Ah, dear were those days, love, when gay and light-hearted,
We deemed that the sunshine would always abide.

'Twas then the green gloom, where the branches hung over,
Was lit by the smile of your gladsome young face.
No warble of bird, and no whisper of lover,
Now breaks the sad silence that broods o'er the place!

Our youth has departed, its roses have faded—
On graves of the past have their petals been shed;
By sorrow and absence our lives are o'ershaded,
But ne'er from our skies has hope's rainbow quite fled.

In years yet to come, though my name be unspoken,
I know the old love, dear, will live in your heart—
As it liveth in mine—for our faith is unbroken,
Despite the hard mandate which doomed us to part.

Ah, dear is the spot where our troth was once plighted,
And dear the green bowers by Eden's swift tide;
But dearer the hope that, at last re-united,
Our hearts may know bliss, which for aye shall abide!

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

MY SATURDAYS.

CHERRY ROPER'S PENANCE.

I.

ONE cold Saturday in January, Charity Roper broke in upon me. I did not lock my door against her, even mentally; but there was something about the girl which always made me use *sudden* words in speaking of her. She was not noisy, or bustling; but she always seemed to take you by surprise, never doing or saying what you would expect, and always appearing where you did not look for her.

"Why, Cherry, my dear," I exclaimed: "I thought you were in London."

"So I was, yesterday," she returned; "but that doesn't hinder my being here to-day, does it? Do you usually take more than twenty-four hours on the journey?"

"No, you absurd child; but I thought you were to stay a month with your cousins."

"They thought so, I daresay, and I let them think; it was no business of mine what they thought. But I was bored there; so yesterday afternoon, when they were all gone to a lecture, or something stupid, I just packed up my traps, and came away."

"Without letting them know, or saying good-bye?"

"Why not? It saved a lot of trouble. I hate good-byes, and they would have bothered me to know why I wouldn't stay."

"They will never ask you there again."

"Oh yes, they will. They want me to make their parties go off. Besides, they know my way. I wrote them a sweet little note last night when I got home, and told them a lot of stories. Par example, I told them that I had fancied from the mother's letters lately that she was not very bright, and that when I began thinking about her yesterday afternoon, I couldn't stand it any longer, and had to see for myself how she was. So you see, instead of thinking me a wretch, they are now admiring my filial devotion. Rather good, isn't it?"

"It is rather good that you have come home, I think, though it need not have been quite so abruptly; for I have not been quite happy about your mother myself."

"Why! She hasn't had one of her upsets, and kept it from me, has she?" asked Cherry, quickly. "It struck me she was looking white."

"Oh, no; it is only that this damp weather has not seemed to agree with her, and I thought she was just in the state in which a

little overdoing, or a chill, would bring one on. Now you are at home she will be all right."

"I'll see to her. I'll keep her in cotton, until the clouds dry up, and the river goes down. But I rather think it will be gun-cotton; for the fact is, Mrs. Singleton, that of all the quarrels mamma and I were ever engaged upon, the present is the finest specimen."

Cherry threw off her fur cape, and settled her muddy boots on the fender-stool, with an air of enjoying the situation.

"I am sorry to hear it," I said. "But I don't think it is any business of mine."

"No business of yours, perhaps," returned Cherry. "But I have come out to-day in the wind on purpose to tell you, and you must listen to me. I want support and sympathy in this matter."

I resigned myself to listen.

"It's about Mr. Goldthorpe," resumed Cherry. "Do you know him?"

"Is it any relation of the old gentleman who was staying with the Mintons in the autumn?"

"That gentleman's father was my Mr. Goldthorpe's mother's husband, and I have always understood that she was only married once, and had but one son."

"Your Mr. Goldthorpe, Cherry?"

"I'm coming to that. In the first place, I wish to observe that he is not *old*, but only *elderly*; to be exact, he was fifty-seven last birthday."

"He looks more," I remarked.

"What do looks matter?" she demanded, scornfully. "Well, I met him two or three times when he was with the Mintons, as you say, and he seemed to take a fancy to your humble servant; but I never thought of its coming to anything. Then he turned up again when I was in London this time, and was always coming to Portman Square. He sent me bouquets, and tickets for the opera, and one evening he all but declared himself, but I escaped, and the next day he sent me a bracelet. I thought then it was time to run away, and here I am. Now you have the true inner history of my Hegira."

"And a very tangled history it is, now I have got it. I don't understand what you mean to do, or what you have been doing, or why you have done it. I wonder if you know yourself?"

"I do know, quite well. I mean to marry Mr. Goldthorpe. I did not let him propose to me at once, because I hadn't quite made up my mind; and then I didn't like the affair going on in somebody else's house, and the mater knowing nothing about it. So I came back to her, thinking she would be as pleased as Punch; and a nice return I got for my dutifulness!"

"What did she say?"

"Asked me if I loved him! And when I couldn't produce feelings exactly up to boiling point, cooled down what feelings I had

with floods of sentiment. This morning we had another talk, of a less affecting nature; and she told me right out that I was going to sell myself, and that she would never give her consent. In fact, if I had wanted to marry an ensign living on his pay—instead of a financier with 10,000*l.* a-year, she couldn't have been more cruelly, sternly unrelenting."

"Probably she would have been less so."

"I daresay. It's rather queer to have all the sentimentality on the mother's side, and all the common-sense on the daughter's; but such is the progress of the age we live in. Now, you see, we are at the dead lock."

"I see. But, Cherry, why are you so bent on this marriage? You are young and pretty—you know it as well as I do; much happier chances may come to you."

"They may, and also they mayn't. This one has, and it may never come again. Besides, I wouldn't make a romantic marriage for anything; it's sure to be unlucky, by way of carrying out its character."

"But need you make such a very unromantic one as this? I won't say anything about love; but is Mr. Goldthorpe a man whom you can heartily like and respect?"

"I like him—as well as most women like their husbands. I feel that I soon could get used to him, which is a fair average of matrimonial felicity. And Mr. Goldthorpe is an honourable man, respected by all who know him. I shall be respected as his wife."

"And that satisfies you?"

"One can't have everything. Look here, Mrs. Singleton. I am just sick of being poor, *sick* of it. I hate having to save and scrape, and travel third class, and dye my old dresses. I hate seeing mamma pale and drooping, when a month at the seaside would put her to rights. Poverty is miserable, and wretched, and degrading; I've had to stand it all my life, but now I have a chance of escape, I should be simply a fool if I let it slip."

Cherry spoke in desperate earnest, staring into the fire, while the angry spots burnt larger and larger in her cheeks. After a pause, I said:

"I had hoped something quite different for you. I thought last summer that you and Hugh Carfield understood each other."

"Dr. Carfield has no right and no reason to complain of anything that I may do," Cherry replied stiffly. "There was never the shadow of an engagement between us."

"No, but I am sure that he thought he had more than the shadow of a hope."

"That was his folly, then. But I didn't come here to talk about Dr. Carfield. I came because the Indian box from Mrs. McClure arrived this morning. She has sent a lot of lovely things for the Mission Bazaar, mixed up with presents for us, and things for her

children ; and we've been unpacking them half the day. And mamma wants you to come in to tea on Monday, and look at them ; for she will have to pack up all the bazaar things on Tuesday, and send them in to London."

"Very well ; tell her, with my love, that I should like to come very much, and I will be in about four."

"That's right : you'll oblige me also by so doing. I got a note from Mr. Goldthorpe by the afternoon post (prompt, wasn't it ?) asking my leave to come down and call on Monday afternoon. Of course there is no doubt what that means. Now you'll keep mamma quiet, and so I can give him his opportunity nicely, and get things settled. I am sure you will always be on the side of distressed lovers," she concluded, with a whimsical glance at me.

"I don't see any lovers in this case," I said, gravely, "nor any distress ; and I don't feel called upon to co-operate. You must excuse me to your mother, Cherry ; I shall not go : it will be much better for her to see Mr. Goldthorpe, and for you all to settle your affairs in my absence."

"Ah, but I shan't excuse you," cried Cherry, jumping up from her chair, and making a pirouette on one toe. "You aren't engaged, and you aren't unwell, and you said you would come, and you must. I'll take no other message than the one you gave me. Good-bye, until Monday."

And the door was shut behind her, before I could repeat my refusal.

I don't think I have much to add to what she said about herself in order to make the situation clear. Her mother was a widow, with a small income, of which she seldom spoke, and never complained. Mrs. Roper had lived her life, and accepted the limitations of her fate ; poverty and self-denial were entirely tolerable to her, but the slightest deviation from her fastidious standard of honourableness was not. And it was to such a mother that this wilful girl declared her intention of perjuring herself at the altar, and swearing to love, honour, and obey a man to whom she meant to do neither, in consideration of the luxuries that money can buy ! I knew how deeply wounded she must be, in every fibre of her proud and sensitive spirit, and I grieved for her.

Then, too, I was hurt about this business of Hugh Carfield. He was Dr. Bramston's partner, and a quiet young man, but very clever in his profession, and nice in every way. Dr. Bramston had for many years enjoyed a vested right in killing and curing the inhabitants of Tamston, disputed only by a stray homœopath, whom nobody patronised, except the dissenters. However, Dr. Bramston's cob had for some time seemed to be going slower and slower, and there were those among us who had misgivings as to whether his master were not falling equally behind the times. So we were not sorry when he anticipated competition by bringing down a youthful partner,

fresh from Paris and Berlin, with the latest medical science at his fingers' ends. I was particularly pleased, for Hugh Carfield came with a special introduction to me from his mother, who was one of my oldest and dearest friends, though we had not met for years. I was anxious to know and like her son, but he was rather shy, and much absorbed in his work; and it was only during the illnesses of little Tim and Lena Graham * that I really came to know him. Since then we had become intimate. When I have said that he only needed experience to make him a perfect doctor, I have said all that is possible; for it has always seemed to me that the union of tenderness, firmness, patience, and skill, which forms the ideal (often realised) of his profession, represents all but the highest type of human nature.

But my favourite had given his whole heart's love to Cherry Roper, and she had smiled on him for a summer, and now was ready to throw him over for a stock-broker old enough to be her father! I was angry and disgusted with the girl, though I could never resist her witcheries when she was present. I would not go, and be made her tool, and engage her mother's attentions, while she hooked her elderly lover—not I!

Nevertheless, when Monday came, I went.

II.

It was about a quarter of an hour's walk from my house to Mrs. Roper's, which stood near the river, a little way outside Tamston. The nearest way from the high road was a path leading to a foot-bridge over a stream, which ran past the lawn. The stream was now flooded, and I found the water just up to the level of the bridge, and could barely cross without wetting my feet. The river had risen over the intervening meadows, and lines of hedges alone enabled one to recognise localities, like meridians over the oceans in a map. The house stood on a little piece of rising ground, and the garden sloped down from it; the lower half was now covered with muddy water.

The creepers on the house were bare brown stems, the flower-beds were empty; and I thought to myself that Mr. Goldthorpe's first impressions would certainly not be cheering.

The second impressions would be reassuring, though, if he felt, as I did, the pleasantness of the tiny drawing-room into which I stepped, almost from the hall-door. Carpets, curtains, and chair-covers might be shabby; but the greenhouse door was filled up with a blaze of primulas, cyclamen and crocuses, the fruit of Mrs. Roper's clever and untiring gardening; a bright fire sparkled upon the array of fanciful Indian ornaments and drapery displayed on a side-table, and various pretty foreign "objects," and a few good water-colour sketches, decorated the walls as permanent inhabitants. Mrs. Roper herself, unmistakeably a lady, in her quiet black dress and soft white cap and

* See "How She Atoned," *ARGESY*, March, 1883.

shawl, presented no alarming spectacle to a man in search of a mother-in-law. I thought Cherry looked less pretty than usual, rather too smartly dressed, and rattling a lot of bangles whenever she moved, which was every minute, as she seemed unable to sit still.

I duly inspected the Indian articles, poor Mrs. Roper displaying them in peaceful unconsciousness of any fresh disturbance impending; but I own that I could only give them half my attention, while I listened for a step outside. Presently, there came a heavy crunch on the gravel, and a loud knock which seemed almost in the room. There was a startled pause among us three ladies; Cherry turned scarlet; her mother glanced at her, and understood it all. The flush was reflected more faintly on her delicate cheeks, and she seated herself to await the event. We heard the little maid-servant open the door, and a rather loud man's voice enquire for Miss Roper; then followed a shuffling and stumping with overcoat and umbrella; the little maid announced some name hitherto unknown to history, and retired behind the door to let the visitor enter.

I really cannot describe Mr. Goldthorpe, because there is nothing to describe about him. Walk down Old Broad Street early in any week-day afternoon, and you will be sure to meet half-a-dozen prosperous elderly gentlemen, any one of whom will do to represent Cherry Roper's latest lover. He had "City" stamped on every line of his face and every fold of his clothing; and I felt sure that Mrs. Roper (whose connections were all with the Church and the Army) was inwardly turning up the nose of gentility. With this phase of her feelings I did not so deeply sympathise.

"How do you do, Mr. Goldthorpe?" she said, rising to greet him. "I did not expect to see you in Tamston at this time of year; visitors are apt to be frightened by our floods."

"Didn't you, ma'am? Ah!—I—I thought you might have."

Mrs. Roper glanced at Cherry again, but the girl sat mute and uncomfortable.

"No; I did not know that you were likely to be in the neighbourhood; but you must not put an inhospitable construction on my surprise. Let me give you a cup of tea. I hope you did not get your feet wet in coming."

"Thank you; no sugar, please. The roads are abominably muddy; I ought to apologise for the state of my boots; but there's nothing to wet one. Not that I care about wet feet; I never coddle. I suppose that in summer this is quite a pleasant situation?" he added, turning the subject.

"Oh, yes," said Cherry. "We have a dear little lawn. It is at the bottom of the stream now, but in summer the stream is at the bottom of it, and we keep a boat there, and can go on the river whenever we like."

"Ah, quite so. Just the place to do the rural in then, but not the thing for winter. You should come into town, ma'am; there's always

something going on in London, even at the dearest season. And Miss Roper is quite wasted down here."

"This is my home," answered Mrs. Roper coldly. "I have neither the wish nor the power to leave it, and I should be sorry if my daughter could not be contented without gaiety."

"Oh, I get occasional runs to London," put in Cherry. "And even in winter you see we manage to have some summer indoors," directing his attention to the flowers.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Goldthorpe, taking the suggestion with greater quickness than I should have expected from him. "You have a fine show, indeed. May I look at them a little closer? I do a little in primulas myself, or rather my head gardener does. He took first prize at the last show, but there was nothing there to match that plant in the middle."

After this, talk languished, and I had to do my best to help. Mr. Goldthorpe could neither find an excuse for staying, nor for going away. He picked up his hat from the carpet, changed it about from one hand to the other, and put it down again, more than once, while Cherry counted her bangles over and over again. At last, he pulled out his watch, and took a tremendous resolution.

"You'll excuse me, ma'am, but important business obliges me to leave by the 6.30 train. It won't do for me to miss it."

"On no account," Mrs. Roper assented, cordially. "The time of you gentlemen in business is so valuable that we could not attempt to detain you."

"But before I go, I should wish to speak a word to you in private, if you please, if Miss Roper and this lady will excuse me," with a comprehensive bow.

"I will trouble you to come into the dining-room, then," said Mrs. Roper, rising. "I know I need not apologise to Mrs. Singleton."

"No, indeed," I said; "but you must allow me to say good-bye first. It is high time for me to be going home." And home I went; but, as I afterwards heard the history of the conversation from Mrs. Roper, I am in a position to continue the narrative, notwithstanding.

Mr. Goldthorpe planted himself at one side of the little square table, and deposited his hat upon the red cloth, with an air of coming to business. Mrs. Roper sat facing him on the other side, ready for battle.

"I suppose, ma'am," he began, "that Miss Roper has informed you why I am here to-day."

"I think I told you, when you first came, Mr. Goldthorpe, that your arrival was unexpected by me."

"Ah! she left the explanations to me. Well, I am here to explain."

"Pray do not suppose that a friendly visit needs any explanation. I look upon yours to-day in that light: I beg that you will not ask me to regard it in any other."

"But I do ask you, ma'am. I came for a purpose; and when I have a purpose, I always carry it out—and, what's more, I succeed in it."

"It will be wiser, then, for you not to pursue one in which you have no prospect of success."

"Let there be no misunderstanding between us, ma'am," said Mr. Goldthorpe, hurriedly. "I have the highest possible esteem and respect for yourself, but it is your daughter that I want to marry."

Mrs. Roper nearly sprang from her chair in indignation, but insulted dignity gave her additional self-possession, and she replied:

"Although such a misapprehension might have naturally arisen, considering the respective ages of all concerned, yet I assure you, sir, that it never for a moment crossed my mind. My daughter told me that you had paid her considerable attention while in London; and I conceived that the reason of your presence here was to ask my consent to your suit."

"So it is, ma'am; so it is," said Mr. Goldthorpe, reassured; "and I hope I have it."

"On the contrary, I have been endeavouring, indirectly, to make you understand that it is useless to ask for it."

"Useless!" he cried. "You don't know what you're saying—you don't know who you're talking to."

"I beg your pardon, I know quite well."

"I daresay you think, because I'm a stockbroker, that I'm a speculator; and that my wife and children may be millionaires one day, and beggars the next. But I've seen too much of that sort of game. It's no business of anyone's what I do with the money I keep loose at my banker's; but there's 60,000*l.* invested in Government stocks and United States bonds and some good railways, that I haven't touched for ten years, and don't mean to. And when I marry, I'll settle every penny of that on my wife and her children; so that, if I went through the Courts next month, she should keep her carriage all the same."

"I will not attempt to discuss the honourableness of that arrangement," answered Mrs. Roper, icily. "I am aware that commercial honour is a different thing from what I have known by the name. My objection is of a different kind altogether."

"Is it my age?" broke in Mr. Goldthorpe. "I was only fifty-seven last birthday, and I'm stronger than most of the young fellows I know. Besides, I'll make her a better husband than a boy, that hasn't half sown his wild oats, and will be wanting his own way, instead of giving her hers."

"I must own that I think such a serious disparity of age a great objection," Mrs. Roper replied; "but that is not the only ground. Mr. Goldthorpe, has my daughter ever led you to believe that she loved you?"

"Why, I certainly thought the young lady did not seem

unfavourably disposed towards me. But, without having had it from her own lips, I should not like to use such a strong expression."

"I am glad to hear you say so; I did not believe she would have deceived you. Am I to understand that you love her?"

"Well, really, the fact that I am ready to ask her to be my wife is proof enough that I feel towards her as I ought. I'm not a sentimental man—never professed to be; and I don't know that I can get up a grand passion. But I like Miss Roper better than any young lady I ever met. She will make me a good wife; I'll make her a good husband; and, without boasting, I may say that when she is Mrs. Goldthorpe, there'll be a good many women who would give something to stand in her shoes."

"She will never be Mrs. Goldthorpe with my consent," said Mrs. Roper, rising.

"Not?" said Mr. Goldthorpe, blankly.

"Certainly not. If she wished to marry to poverty, should I not have a right to forbid her? And have I not a right to forbid her to marry to poverty of the heart, which is ten thousand times as miserable? If you had not money enough between you to live upon, you would recognise my right to say 'No.' You have not love enough between you to live upon, and I say it far more emphatically."

"Miss Roper is of age, I understand?"

"She is, Mr. Goldthorpe. I am perfectly aware that I have no legal right to hinder her from acting as she chooses; but any moral right that I have—I shall exercise to the full."

"Well, I shall give the young lady the opportunity of deciding for herself. I suppose I cannot see her here."

"I shall not make my house a prison for my daughter. She is at liberty to receive you if, after consideration, she wishes to do so. I refuse nothing but my personal consent to a marriage without affection, which must result in misery to one or both."

"You have no right, Mrs. Roper, to doubt my affection for your daughter, because I can't make speeches about it."

"I do not doubt its reality, Mr. Goldthorpe, but I doubt its adequacy; and I doubt hers for you still more. Be persuaded; think the matter over, and seek a more suitable partner. In any case, believe that I intend no discourtesy to yourself."

"Do you think it over, too, ma'am, and you'll see things more reasonably. I have to go to Paris to-morrow, but when I come back I'll run down again. Give my best compliments to Miss Roper; I brought a ring that I hoped to give her, but that will be for next time. Good evening, ma'am."

And he bowed himself out, leaving poor Mrs. Roper to face Cherry. I fancy she had small pleasure out of the fact that she was left the undoubted victor in that afternoon's campaign.

III.

OF course I did not like to visit Mead Cottage again in a hurry, as if I were anxious to hear what had happened in my absence; but I had not very long to wait. Mrs. Roper was one of those unfortunate persons whose mind and body act and re-act upon each other so closely, that it is always open to kind friends to call their mental sufferings indigestion, and their bodily ailments "nerves." She was at church on Sunday, but on Monday she was prostrate, and was very unwell for two or three days. Cherry ostentatiously blamed the damp, and I privately blamed Cherry. She would not send for me while her mother was actually ill, and there certainly was no occasion, as she was herself the cleverest and tenderest of nurses; but on Thursday I had a note from her, asking me to spend the whole of the next day with them, and mentioning that I should have to go round by the road, as the little foot-bridge was now quite under water.

"One more such victory, and you are undone, my poor friend," I remarked that Friday afternoon, after I had enjoyed Mrs. Roper's narrative of her encounter with Mr. Goldthorpe. "It has taken too much out of you."

"What does that matter?" she said. "It has given Cherry time to think again; and she only needs time for thought. My child could not do such a thing deliberately. This little illness of mine has been a fortunate thing. It has given us both occupation, and allowed us to hold our tongues. We should have vexed each other if we had been shut up together these wet days, and obliged to talk."

We were sitting in the drawing-room, Mrs. Roper reclining, invalid fashion, in an easy chair well lined with pillows, and wrapped in a large white shawl. Suddenly a loud knock came to the door. She started, and flushed painfully.

"It is that man again," she said. "Oh! I did not think it would have been so soon."

"Let me tell him that you are too unwell to see him," I said, making a move towards the door; but she stopped me.

"He does not want to see me; it is Cherry; and I promised that he should see her, if she chose. He must come in."

As we were speaking, the door was opened. It was Mr. Goldthorpe who had knocked, and he did ask only for Cherry; but it never occurred to stupid little Jane to do anything but show him into the drawing-room, while she went in great excitement to tell her. Of course he fell into a confusion of apologies and explanations when he saw the state of affairs, but he did not offer the best of all possible apologies by taking himself away. On the contrary, he discoursed about his journey to Paris, until Cherry appeared. She looked flushed and serious, and greeted him quietly.

After about ten minutes of company talk, she said:

"You will excuse me, I am sure, Mr. Goldthorpe; but now that

mamma is so unwell, she is my first object—and when you arrived, I was doing a little cooking for her, which I cannot leave to the servant. I must go back and see to it.”

“Certainly,” answered Mr. Goldthorpe; “don’t mind me, I beg. I shall feel gratified by your not standing upon ceremony with me, and I am sure Mrs. Roper must feel an appetite for food cooked by your hands.”

“Then I will say good-bye,” said Cherry, holding out her hand.

“But aren’t you coming back? I don’t mind waiting. I only came from Paris this morning, and I have come down here at once to see you.” His voice grew quite piteous.

“Oh, yes, I am coming back,” said Cherry, glancing at her mother rather uncertainly. “But, you see, we are a little put out just at present.”

Mrs. Roper’s hospitable instincts now came uppermost.

“Suppose, dear, you combine that cookery for me with tea for everybody; Mr. Goldthorpe needs some refreshment, I am sure, after his tiring day; and Mrs. Singleton likes to go home early.”

There was general acquiescence; Cherry departed to her household cares, and Mr. Goldthorpe and I talked Paris with redoubled vigour. In about half an hour, a pleasant and substantial meal appeared, over which Cherry presided. Her lover expanded in the presence of his goddess; he was radiant with good humour, paid compliments all round, especially to her, and actually told some anecdotes, at which he laughed very loudly himself. Cherry smiled amiably, and I thought of the days when she would know them all by heart, and have to laugh as dutifully the seventh time of hearing as the first.

After tea she sang us a couple of pretty songs, and Mr. Goldthorpe sat by the piano, and beat time. If there is any practice calculated to drive a singer distracted, it is that; and Cherry’s forehead wrinkled, and she left out a verse of her second song.

“That’s the sort of singing I like in a lady,” he remarked when she had finished. “No fuss about it, no screaming or running all about the place; but just a pretty little song that you can enjoy after dinner. When I want professionals, I can pay for them.”

This dubious compliment perhaps accounted for the slight bang with which Cherry shut the piano; and I rose to say good-night, knowing that Mrs. Roper must be tired, and hoping that Mr. Goldthorpe would follow my example, and postpone his proposal to a more favourable opportunity.

“I shall see you safe on the high road,” said Cherry decisively. “Our lane is not in a state for you to travel by yourself in the dark. I’ll get the lantern.”

She speedily re-appeared, cloaked, and bearing the lantern; and of course Mr. Goldthorpe could do nothing else but offer to carry it. We started off, but did not go far. We had barely gone round the corner of the house when a lapping sound close by startled us. Mr.

Goldthorpe held the lantern lower, and it gleamed upon water lying on the ground walk. He held it higher, and it gleamed upon water covering the whole path, and we could hear the stream gurgling through the gate at the end.

"The flood must have risen tremendously fast," said Cherry. "Why, you came through this way three hours ago, Mr. Goldthorpe?"

"Upon my word, I couldn't have believed it," he said, much perturbed. "I never guessed anything of this sort was likely to happen."

"I wonder if I could wade it," I speculated.

"Impossible," said Cherry decisively. "The ground rather falls than rises beyond the garden-gate, as far as the first turn of the lane. You would find the water deeper the farther you went."

"And we could not manage the boat in the dark?"

"We could not get to it. It is laid up—as we thought, high and dry—on the mound near the shrubbery; but there is a stream between us and it now."

"Then what is to be done?" asked Mr. Goldthorpe.

"There is only one thing to be done," Cherry answered gaily. "You must resign yourselves to circumstances, and be our prisoners for to-night. We'll put you up somehow—you must not be too particular, and in the morning, if you can't make your escape in our own boat, we shall easily be able to signal someone to bring us a punt."

"I, for one, shall be contented to be a prisoner to so fair a gaoler," said Mr. Goldthorpe gallantly.

I re-appeared in the house, feeling somewhat discomfited; but Cherry and her lover were in high spirits. Explanations were made to Mrs. Roper, whom Cherry insisted on taking off to bed; and after she had disposed of her for the night, arrangements for the accommodation of her unexpected guests kept her busy away from us. Mr. Goldthorpe, sitting alone in the drawing-room with me, began to look on the shady side of his imprisonment.

"I suppose we are sure to be able to get a boat in the morning?" he questioned anxiously.

"It depends upon whether any come this way or not, I should say," I replied. "I must say that I cannot think what is to bring them."

"But if I don't get a boat, I can't get back to town; and I must be at my office at twelve to-morrow. I have a most important engagement."

"Then I hope you will get a boat."

"At any rate, this sort of thing can't last. The river will go down as fast as it came up, I daresay."

"Floods have been known to last three weeks without abating," I told him for his encouragement. I was willing that Cherry should see how cross he could be. In spite of his fine speeches, he was rapidly falling into that state of mind; and when Cherry announced that our rooms were ready, he made no attempt to detain her for the

tête-à-tête which now at length was possible, but took his candle, and marched away gloomily to his chamber. Cherry gave me her room, and went to her mother's; but I did not sleep very well in her little white bed, for the river whirled confusedly through my dreams.

With the first gleam of daylight I was at the window, and looked out upon a sea of brown waters. I afterwards learned that a weir had burst, which accounted for the rapid rise. The water was up to the very walls of the house, and flowing past it in a strong stream. Evidently, there was no possibility of escape from within. Was there any of rescue from without?

I did not feel very cheerful as I went down to breakfast, nor did Mr. Goldthorpe look so. He was standing at the dining-room window, watching for boats.

"This is a bad business, ma'am," he said, as I came in.

"I hope there is nothing worse before us than a few hours in comfortable quarters and pleasant society," I replied, trying to be cheerful.

"As to the society, there can be no doubt; the quarters are not quite the same thing. Habit, you know, ma'am, is second nature; and I must own that I find it difficult to dispense with certain little comforts."

At this juncture Cherry entered, followed by Jane with a tray, and I must say that Mr. Goldthorpe did full justice to the little comforts that were still at his disposal. Mrs. Roper was reported not so well, having had a wakeful night, and I knew to what to attribute it.

Would Mr. Goldthorpe use his opportunity? No man ever had a better. Here he was, shut up with his lady-love for hours, her mother safe out of the way, and her other chaperon frequently sitting with the invalid. I knew at least one other who would have cared little in such a situation for floods outside and business in London, but thought himself in Paradise. Mr. Goldthorpe was of a different opinion. He kept perpetually fidgeting over to the window, looking out for the boat that never came, and interrupting all attempts at talk or occupation.

"It's no use, Mr. Goldthorpe," said Cherry at last. "Nothing seems to pass us except some poor man's swede turnips. You'd better occupy yourself in fishing for them. We may be thankful to have them for dinner in a day or two."

"For dinner!"

"Well, seriously, things look somewhat blue. We have very little room for keeping anything in this house, and we get most things in small quantities. The butcher was to have called this very day, and unless he takes boat to us now, we shall be short commons at dinner-time. The only things that we have a good supply of are flour, bacon, tea, and jam."

"We shan't starve, at any rate," I remarked, much relieved by the presence of tea in the list.

"But one can't live on flour and bacon," said Mr. Goldthorpe in dismay.

"Flour can be made into bread, and I shall proceed to effect the conversion, if necessary," laughed Cherry. "If we can't live on bread, bacon, and tea, for a day or two, we must be Sybarites."

"One need not be a Sybarite to object to living like a farm-labourer," Mr. Goldthorpe muttered. "Really, when one lives in such a place, one should make provision for what may happen."

Cherry did not reply, but left the room rather offended. By-and-bye she recovered her temper, and her sense of duty towards Mr. Goldthorpe. She returned to the drawing-room, and tried with all her might to entertain him. She sang to him until he got up and walked to the window, yawning, and looking out for boats. She played cribbage with him until he grew tired of beating her, and she grew tired of being beaten. She took her work, and waited for him to begin making love to her; but he never began. In the intense ennui of that day, the poor girl did ample penance for the sin of her flirtation with him.

At last, about the middle of the afternoon, an idea struck her.

"If you are so very anxious to go, Mr. Goldthorpe, can't you make an attempt to get the boat? It is only at the other side of the shrubbery, tied up, and the oars are in the house. I don't think the water can be above your knees anywhere between us and it, and once you had got to it, you would be all right."

"Let me tell you, Miss Roper," he replied ill-temperedly, "that it is not so easy to walk in a current of water up to one's knees; I should probably lose my footing. And when I had got the boat, it would be of no use. I am not accustomed to rowing, especially in such awkward places as this. I should certainly be upset, and drowned, and I prefer the chance of being starved."

Cherry subsided, and the day dragged through without any heroic attempt at remedy. We had what I should have thought a nice and sufficient little dinner, but for Mr. Goldthorpe's scarcely disguised disgust; and we ladies enjoyed an hour's peace, while he slept after it. We all went to bed early; and if ever a girl looked utterly fagged and worn-out, it was Cherry Roper on the night of that wet Saturday which was to have been her betrothal day.

IV.

MORNING dawned, and a dreary light spread slowly over a dreary scene. We had agreed that ten o'clock would be quite soon enough for breakfast, and about that hour I wended my way downstairs. The hall-door was open, and Mr. Goldthorpe stood at it, staring out dismally at the prospect, and keeping up his everlasting watch for boats. So far from falling, the flood had risen in the night, and it was now nearly up to the step. Marked only by the tops of sub-

merged hedges and palings, the brown water stretched in front of us over miles of country. We could not tell how far it spread, for trees bounded our view; but under and around every visible object there was the dull gleam of water. The trees swayed in the current across the meadows, the pines dipped their needles into the quiet stream that overflowed the shrubberies, distant roofs seemed to rise out of the river, and we could hear a faint lowing, as of cows in distress. Every now and then something indistinguishable would float down the main stream, too far away for us to make out what it might be, though we strained our eyes; but never came a boat. Indeed, none could have come by way of the river; it would have been impossible for any to have lived in such a current. The sky was heavy, and looked full of rain; and there seemed no reason why the flood should ever go down.

It was not a cheerful sight, and I turned from it to meet Cherry in the dining-room.

"Breakfast is ready," she said. "We have eaten all our bread, and so I have made some hot cakes. But matters are growing serious. I find Jane was mistaken in telling me that we had plenty of flour; we have only about as much left as I have used this morning. The moral of that is—to-morrow we shall probably starve."

"I don't think we shall be left to starve," I said, as cheerfully as I could; "people will be sure to remember what a predicament we must be in."

"I don't know who there is to think much about us," said Cherry, drearily. "And that boat lying there, a few yards off! Oh, if we only had a *man* with us, instead of a *fogey*!"

The fogey was summoned to breakfast, and told the state of affairs, and that it was necessary to make our provisions go as far as we could. He only replied that of course a boat would come, and it was nonsense to starve ourselves; he, for one, was not going to do it. And accordingly, while Cherry and I ate only enough to keep us going, he made extra havoc among the precious cakes, by way of protest against our abstinence. Cherry's patience at last gave way, and when he made a momentary pause, she rose from table and carried away the dish. Mr. Goldthorpe glared after her.

"Polite, upon my word!" he remarked.

I could not stand any more of him just then, and left the room. I was going upstairs when I heard a sudden call from Cherry in the kitchen. I hurried to her; she was standing at the back-door, with clasped hands and gleaming eyes.

"A boat!" she cried; "a boat, coming here!"

I looked where she pointed, and, through one of the bare hedges, could see something moving in a neighbouring field.

"Let us call," I said; "it may not come to us."

"It is coming," said Cherry; "don't you trouble."

I wonder who it can be?" I remarked innocently.

She turned, and flashed a look at me. "A friend of yours," she said, her eyes dancing with fun; "come to take you home to luncheon. There'll be all the more cakes for Mr. Goldthorpe's tea."

The boatman knew his way, apparently; he was feeling along the hedge for a thin place, where he could force his boat through, for of course it was impossible to open any gates. We could hear him breaking away boughs. Presently, there appeared among the thorns what proved to be the bow of a light river gig, and slowly the inmate pushed and pulled himself and his boat through. The instant that he had done so, however, he was in the full current of the stream which flowed past the lawn; his boat was whirled round, and swept away towards the river. He had been obliged to draw in his oars when passing her through the hedge, and now he could not at once get them into use. In that moment, how far he had been carried! Could he recover himself? We watched helplessly and breathlessly. There was not only the danger of the boat's being carried into the river, but of its being wrecked against something under water, which he could not see or know of. But he knew his ground. He let the stream carry him past the garden, and out into the meadow beyond. There, of course, the current was slacker, and he easily pulled aside out of it into the comparatively quiet water, where he could turn his boat round. We had rushed to one of the upstairs windows, and could see the incidents of the perilous little voyage. Without encountering the stream a second time, the oarsman made his way into the garden through a weak place in the hedge at the bottom, as he had broken in from the field, and slowly poled himself up between the rose bushes. By that time the whole household was gathered at the door, to welcome Hugh Carfield. Of course it was he: Cherry had known it from the first, and I had not been long in guessing who was most likely to have come to our rescue.

"Are you all well?" shouted the young man, almost before he was within speaking distance.

"All well," responded Mr. Goldthorpe, with an air of responsibility. "I hope you have brought us provisions."

"Everything I could think of that would go in my boat," answered Hugh, bringing it up to the steps.

"You see I was right," said Mr. Goldthorpe, turning round to us. "I told you that a boat would come, and that such measures as Miss Roper proposed this morning were quite unnecessary. But young ladies always like to do the heroic."

It was so provoking that he *had* been right, that, if I had not been so hungry myself, I could almost have wished that relief had not come so soon. But by this time Mrs. Roper was shaking hands with our deliverer.

"I don't know how to thank you, Dr. Carfield," she said, "for coming to help us—and at such risk, too!"

"Don't take too much to yourself, mamma," laughed Cherry. "Dr.

Carfield would never have left Mrs. Singleton to starve." Then, in a lower tone she added, as he clasped her hand: "It was good of you to come. I was never so glad of anything in my life as to see your boat behind the hedge."

Hugh could find nothing nice to say, of course—Englishmen never can when they are the heroes of the situation; so he only asked how we had fared. After we had related our experiences (or some of them), a council of war was held, at which it was promptly and unanimously decided that Hugh should return to the town, and send punts at once to remove the whole party, the men being provided with hatchets to cut away the gates which blocked the lane. Mrs. Roper and Cherry would return with me to my house. He departed, taking a more circuitous and safer route than that by which he had come. Cherry watched him out of sight; and then we made a hasty but very cheerful supplement to our short breakfast, and proceeded to devote ourselves to the task of packing up what they needed to take with them, and putting the house in a state to be left empty. We were so absorbed in our work that we never heard the arrival of the first punt. The sound of voices outside, however, drew us to the house-door, just in time to see it pushing off, with Mr. Goldthorpe seated inside. When he caught sight of us he waved his hand, and called out:

"Excuse my not saying good-bye, ladies: important business—must catch next train; your boat will be up in a minute."

Cherry stood for a moment in speechless indignation, then burst out laughing.

"He is gone," she cried. "Hurrah! I never was so rejoiced to see anyone's back. The Old Man of the Sea was a joke to him; Michael Scott's familiar spirit was a pleasant companion. He is the worst incubus that ever a set of unfortunate women had on their shoulders for two interminable days!" Then turning to her mother, she added with intense gravity: "I am quite satisfied now, mamma, that I did right in discouraging Mr. Goldthorpe. You must see for yourself that it never would have done."

That was Cherry Roper's only peccavi, but it was quite enough for her mother. I doubt that even Hugh got much more out of her at any time; but if she kept her contrition to herself, and made confession to nobody, she at any rate made ample satisfaction for her fit of worldliness. For when Mr. Goldthorpe recovered himself, and wrote a formal proposal of marriage she refused him with equal formality; and a month or two later, her engagement to Hugh Carfield was announced. He is not exactly a poor man, but he is not likely ever to be a rich one; yet Cherry seems perfectly contented. She herself accounts for it by saying that the great merit of a doctor as a husband is that you don't have enough of his society to get tired of him.

VERA SINGLETON.

CHECKMATED.

SHE was so pretty! and it was such a charming blush with which she greeted him. Algernon Gregson was a very good-looking fellow himself, and he knew it. No one was better able to throw a fascinating emprise into words which meant nothing, and the only apparent object of his dark eyes was to make more decided love than his tongue might venture on.

Circumstances decidedly favoured lovers that glorious August day, when the pic-nic party landed from a steam-launch and roamed about the shady woods of lovely Cliefden. Many couples could find retirement there, the shade was so deep; and the only danger lay in the too great apparent security the thick undergrowth gave for the utterance of tender sentiments—it being quite possible that a soured bachelor, or implacable paterfamilias, might be roaming unseen within ear-shot.

There are never enough eligibles at a pic-nic—at least so mothers say; and it is well-known that those young men who are handsomest, who scull best, and give most life to everything, are undesirable matrimonial speculations.

Milly St. Aubyn had no mother to watch her, and her good-natured chaperone liked to see her happy—besides Algernon Gregson had not less than 500*l.* a-year, and Milly, who had nothing, could not look for a rich husband.

But no matrimonial intentions disturbed the mind of the handsome Algernon. He was simply enjoying the time and the opportunity, and thinking it a vast pity such a pretty girl as Milly should be a pauper. People were all paupers in Algernon's eyes unless they had at least as much as himself; but he did not dislike pretty paupers, and always flirted with them. To himself he never admitted the possibility of marrying anything less than an heiress, and he knew of one now who was quite prepared to marry him.

"Going to Scotland!" said Algernon, as Milly's gentle voice told him her autumn plans; "perhaps we shall meet there. I am promised some shooting shortly."

Milly's ready blush came up, and her soft, merry blue eyes were raised in pleasure. She did not know that the heiress Algernon intended for himself lived in Scotland, and was able to promise shooting! She was not quite in love—but very near it, and the woods and their bird-voices seemed hurrying her on. Besides, her cavalier had decided that he must not see this pretty pauper again, so was as fascinating as possible.

A few days later Milly started for the north, feeling just a little pang of disappointment that Mr. Gregson had never called since the picnic. She spent a night in Edinburgh, and then went on to the end of her journey, where some lively young cousins met her, and during a long country drive to her uncle's place they told her all the news and plans for pleasure.

"We've got ten visitors besides you, Milly, and you won't be a visitor at all! because mother has just had another bed put in my room for you. She always rolls up the 'girls' into bundles when the shooting begins, and gives our nice rooms to the fat old ladies and people who invite us to town in the season," announced Gertie, with a laughing toss of the head.

"I'm so glad I shall be amongst you all!" said Milly, looking admiringly at the distant hills, and a winding, silvery river. "This does feel invigorating after stuffy London!"

"Here we are," cried Lilian, a pretty, fair little thing. "Mamma is there to welcome you, coz, and gouty Sir Thomas has hobbled out behind her, because we told him what a beauty you were!"

"For shame, Lil," said Gertie, laughing; "look how she blushes!"

"Welcome to Scotland, my dear," said aunt Myra, with an affectionate embrace. "This is our old friend, Sir Thomas Wye—he knew your poor mother well."

"And am delighted to meet a daughter who resembles her," said the old gentleman, whose face was very fat, and the colour of it a mixture of red and blue. "You did not say too much," he added, nodding to Gertie. Then the girls carried off their cousin to the far-away room, where her luggage soon followed. Lilian announced:

"To-night you will meet our 'heiress'—Annie Lyons. She is here for a few days, and you will like her. She's not pretty."

"Heiresses never are," said Gertie; "that's quite fair."

"She has heaps of admirers, though," said Lilian, shaking her head.

"Her fortune has!" laughed Gertie; scornfully.

"It's all the same—nobody looks at *us* when she is here!" dolorously pursued Lilian.

"Make haste and dress, girls," cried Gertie—"there's the bell." Off flew Lilian, and the others quickly arrayed themselves in simple, pretty toilettes, and ran downstairs.

"Annie—this is our London cousin, Milly St. Aubyn," said Gertie, breaking through the little band which surrounded a small, insignificant-looking girl with light brown hair, light grey eyes, and a very pale face. A pleasant smile redeemed the face from absolute plainness, as Miss Lyons cordially extended her hand.

"I have often heard of you, Miss St. Aubyn—and am very glad to meet you."

"Yes," said Gertie; "she will be a new ornament for your picnic next week. Oh! how I hope it will be fine!"

Fervent male responses were heard, for this picnic meant a morning's shooting for the men, and a luncheon on the hill-side, where many fair faces would endeavour to rival the grouse in male appreciation.

At this moment dinner was announced, and Milly's cousin, Laurie Gordon, who had only just arrived at home, came to escort her in.

"That's right, Laurie; look after Milly," said old Mr. Gordon, kindly, as he sought his own partner in one of the stout visitors of whom Gertie had spoken.

"Such a good thing my father is a spare man," whispered Laurie, as he watched the egress of the couple through a not very wide door. Milly laughed silently, and Laurie turned a look of cousinly admiration on her. "What a horrid little thing you were two years ago, Milly! You called me names for flogging my dog."

"So I might now if you did it again!" announced Milly's soft voice, decidedly.

Dinners are all much alike in country houses, and Milly was glad to be away from the places of honour, and chat unreservedly with Laurie.

"There have been all sorts of bets on the heiress marrying somebody this season," he announced.—"There are plenty of aspirants."

"Are you one?" quoth Milly.

"Not I! My ambition is small and my bent not matrimonial; but she *is* so rich, you know. Some big-wigs are in the hunt. They say a man who was here last year has most hopes, though—a London fellow."

That night the three female cousins sat long over their hair-brushing, and the heiress was fully discussed.

"She didn't look at one of them as she looked at that handsome Mr. Gregson last year, Lil," said Gertie.

Milly brushed vigorously.

"Well, he's coming next week. By the way, have you ever met a Mr. Algernon Gregson, Milly?" asked Lilian.

"I think I have," said the quiet voice. But something in the tone made Gertie glance in the glass, where she saw Milly with a pale face.

"Well, I shall be thankful if she marries *anyone*," cried Lilian, as she rose to depart. "It's a horrid bore having to entertain her aspirants."

There was old friendship and much confidence between Gertie and Milly—they had been at school together.

"Milly, do you *care* for Mr. Gregson?" whispered Gertie.

"Hush, Gertie—it's not that! but he seemed to care —"

"I knew the sort of fellow he was!" cried Gertie, vehemently. "Nothing but money will suit him; but he cares no more for poor Annie than for me!"

Quiet tears fell on Milly's cheek, yet she smiled as she clasped Gertie's hand. "Don't mind—the dream was pleasant, but I am glad it's broken, and broken so soon."

Gertie kissed her, and said nothing—but she thought a great deal.

How it was arranged I know not, but on the day of the picnic, when Algernon Gregson drew confidently near the baskets on the hill-side, he beheld the heiress and Milly arm-in-arm, ready with smiles of pretty indifference for the handsome fortune-hunter. He had suggested the possibility of meeting Milly in Scotland, but he had never thought or meant it to be like this. His suave accents were less dulcet than usual—he had never tried to make love to two at a time.

"Fancy meeting you in this charming spot," he ventured to Milly.


"An unforeseen pleasure!" said the pretty pauper, with a steady flash of her blue eyes, and no soft blush.

The heiress was coolly polite, and kept constantly with Milly. Gertie was in no humour to encourage the attentions of a man who had trifled with Milly's feelings. Lilian was looking very happy under an umbrella, where a devoted swain fed her plate with dainties, and two homely Scotch girls and three matrons of elderly years were all that remained for the luckless Adonis!

Still he ventured that evening to propose to the pale little heiress, trusting in the impression he had made the year before. He met with a decided refusal. And fate was really hard upon him, for next morning Milly was missed from the party: had been summoned away, Gertie maliciously announced close to him, by the death of an uncle who had left her a *large* fortune.

Mr. Algernon Gregson sent his shooting equipments to London, and started on a tour through Switzerland, to recruit his shattered nerves.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

BEFORE HE COULD EVEN GUESS HER INTENTION, SHE HAD SNATCHED A
LETTER FROM HIS HAND,